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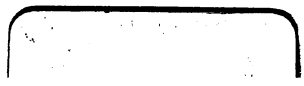
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"And please return it. You may think this a strange request, but I find that although many of my friends are poor arithmeticians, they are nearly all of them good book-keepers." [Scott.]



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BY AMY McLAREN



**Bawbee Jock
The Yoke of Silence**

The Yoke of Silence

By

Amy McLaren

Author of "Bawbee Jock," etc.

G. P. Putnam's Sons
New York and London
The Knickerbocker Press

1912

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The Yoke of Silence

CHAPTER I

A STARTLING INCIDENT

THE harvest field was deserted; the slanting rays of the sun were streaming along the lines of newly-cut grain, turning the heavy heads of barley to bright gold.

A group of workers had just passed out through the gate leading on to the high-road, in the wake of the jingling reaping-machine. The women walked wearily, with their sun-bonnets thrown back from their brown faces; the men in straggling groups.

Sir Andrew Brewster, the laird of Pittivie,* leaned his arm on the top rail of the gate, and gave a kindly nod or word to each worker as they passed out.

He surveyed his crops thoughtfully. Not yet the end of August, and the harvest well begun.

*This old Scotch name is pronounced Pit-i'vy.

The Yoke of Silence

His eye wandered to where the yellow fields of wheat corn swept like a golden fringe along the blue waters of the Firth of Forth. The far stretches of country were almost treeless: the only outstanding feature which caught the eye was the old castle of Finlisk, perched in its rocky promontory, round which the waves beat incessantly. Its eastern gables were a mass of ruins: but to the west, windows still flashed back the rays of the evening sun.

At the sound of footsteps, and the sight of a figure toiling up the steep path leading from the few fisherman's cottages dotted along the rocky beach, Sir Andrew left his position by the gate, and stepped out into the road.

"Good-evening, Sandy. Been a grand day for the harvest," he said, to a sturdy little man in a sou'wester and long sea boots, who carried a creel over his shoulder.

"Graund," was the answer.

It was one of Sandy MacNab's duties to supply the castle with fish. It gave him an opportunity of conversing daily with Margaret

Robertson, the housekeeper, whom he had courted for many years with indifferent success.

Sandy had short legs and a long body. His face was fresh and ruddy, and his blue eyes were very clear and trusting in their expression of ingenuous honesty.

He trudged along by Sir Andrew's side until they came abreast of the high wall which bounded the castle policies. Beyond the iron bars of a gate let into a stone archway, could be seen a road leading across a level stretch of sea turf to where another wall, ruined in places, sheltered the garden and immediate surroundings of the castle.

Sir Andrew had opened the gate, and was about to pass through, but Sandy halted, and put up his hand to the back of his ear.

"A queer like soond, thon? It 'll be the syren, I 'm thinkin'?" and his eyes searched the line of horizon for any sign of rising fog.

Sir Andrew thrust his hands into the pockets of his old shooting-coat, and, with bent head, listened, frowning.

"A motor horn," he said laconically.

He disliked motors, and would have forbidden them the right to invade his kingdom if he could. The road to Pittavie led to nowhere except the castle and the village, and he did not wish the bustle and noise of the outside world to be brought to his very doors.

"A motor?" echoed Sandy. "Ane o' they rantin tantin deevils? What's it speirin' aifter in they pairts?"

He craned his neck to see if anything was visible, but although the sound of the approaching motor was every moment becoming more distinct, nothing could be seen from where they stood, owing to the peculiar nature of the ground. Flat as was the surrounding country, it was broken here and there by deep and sudden indentations, and marked by isolated masses of rock which thrust their beetling brows through the surface.

Both men found themselves straining forward to catch sight of the car as it breasted the first of the steep ascents to the left.

It came thundering on, and shot suddenly view. For a second it seemed to hang

in the mid-air above them, its dark outline, and the figure of its sole occupant silhouetted against the clearness of the sky.

“Is he mad? Why does n’t he slow down?” exclaimed Sir Andrew.

He strode out from the gateway, and holding up his hand, shouted.

Whether the driver could not get his brakes to act, or whether he was possessed with a demon of recklessness was beside the question for the moment. With a rush and a roar, and barely distinguishable in the swirl of dust which it raised, the car tore on.

Sir Andrew caught in his breath quickly. The dangerous part was yet to come. Farther on, the road turned sharply to the right. The overhanging bank made space impossible, and the car was a long one. At the speed at which it was going it was almost impossible to round the corner without smashing into something.

“He ’ll need the deil’s luck tae get roond thon corner,” exclaimed Sandy.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth

when there was the sound of shouting, mingled with the hoot of the horn, and a group of fishermen trundling a hand-cart, on which was a tar barrel and a pile of nets, came into sight.

The motor was seen to swerve to the side and give a plunge forwards. There was a grinding crash as it came into collision with the rock. A cloud of flying splinters and falling debris from the bank above—the whirl and clash of machinery—the sharp report of an explosion; and then silence.

When Sir Andrew reached the overturned wreck of the car, he found the body of a man lying in a huddled heap in the dust of the roadway.

He knelt down and ran his fingers over the prostrate form, which showed no signs of consciousness.

He gently removed the man's cap and motoring mask, and laid his ear against his mouth.

"I 'm thinkin' he 's deid," said one of the men.

Sir Andrew bent more closely over the un-

conscious figure. The man evidently belonged to his own rank in life, and his age might be guessed at anywhere between thirty and thirty-five. A small trickle of blood was oozing from underneath the dark hair above his forehead. His right arm was flung out across the road, and the hand was doubled back in an ugly position.

“Not so bad as that. We must take him up to the house,” he said. “It does n’t look as if he were going to come round here. I am afraid he ’s badly hurt.”

He turned to the group of fishermen who were standing near, looking stolidly on.

“Here, you fellows. Turn your things off that hand-cart, and bring it alongside.”

The men obeyed, and lifted the heavy barrel, half filled with the tar which they used for barking their nets, on to the side of the road. They were going to pile the nets beside it, when Sir Andrew stopped them.

“Leave them on the cart,” he said. “And spread them out. They ’ll make an easier bed for him to lie on.”

He put his hand on Sandy's shoulder, and pointed in the direction of the castle.

"Run on as quickly as you can, and tell Margaret what has happened, and that we're bringing the man up to the house. Be sure and don't frighten the ladies. Do you understand? It is Margaret that you are to find. She'll know what to do."

"Ay, I unnerstan'," answered Sandy, but his brain was in a whirl as he hurried over the ground as fast as his short legs would carry him.

It was all very well to say "find Margaret," but Margaret's duties were multitudinous. No saying how she might be occupied at that time in the evening. He stood in great awe of Margaret.

He opened the door which led through the wall into the garden, and shut it again cautiously. A high hedge of fuchsias, glowing crimson in the sunlight, rose in front of him, and acted as a screen. He was within a stone's throw of the flagged terrace on to which the doors and windows of the lower part of the

castle opened, and hearing voices, he parted the drooping masses of flowers and tried to see what was going on in the garden beyond.

The terrace ran round the base of the castle, and in the centre, a wide stone porch, round which was trained a wealth of roses and honeysuckles, projected over the double doors which led into the hall beyond.

Sandy's heart sank at what he saw on the other side of the fuchsia hedge.

That was her ladyship, in the big basket chair with the red cushions. Her embroidery frame was pushed aside, and she was leaning forward, laughing and talking with her usual vivacity to a girl seated on a low stool before a spinning-wheel. Beside the spinning-wheel stood Margaret: a tall figure in her full gathered stuff gown and black silk apron.

It could truly be said that round Margaret Robertson the domestic life of Pittivie revolved. She was a perfect type of the old-fashioned Scotch servant which was fast dying out. Sixty-five summers had passed over her head and fifty years of that time

had been spent in the service of the Brewster family, for she had come to them as a young girl in the time of Sir Andrew's father. No one ever questioned Margaret's wise rule. She was treated more as a trusted friend than as a dependant, and though a woman of great personal dignity and manner, she had never lost her homely simplicity of speech and accent. Nor would Sir Andrew have wished her to do so. He was proud of her Scotch tongue; and Margaret's sayings were quoted and stored up as household treasures by the family.

The girl at the spinning-wheel was frowning over a strand of tangled yarn. She was very pretty; so pretty that the petulant curve of her short upper lip and the frown on her brow rather added to her charm than detracted from it.

The exact image of herself looked up at her from the rug at her feet, where a baby lay on its back and kicked its little feet in the air and gurgled over a woollen ball which it clasped in its arms.

The girl and the baby were almost as familiar sights to Sandy as Lady Brewster herself. Young Mrs. Adair was Sir Andrew's cousin. She had been living at the castle for the last six months, or more. Why she continued to live there, where her husband was, and why he never came to claim his wife and child, were subjects for gossip in the village.

"Nanny, Nanny! what a perverse little monkey you are," Lady Brewster was saying. "Why don't you let Margaret help you? There! The thread's broken again!"

Nanny kept her foot pressed on the treadle, and the whirr of the spinning-wheel mingled with the raised tones of her voice.

"No, no," she protested. "Don't you dare to touch it, Margaret. Go away—go away!" She shook her head vehemently.

"Go away and do something else. It always breaks when you come and watch. Look at baby's ball. It's rolling down the path. She'll cry if you don't get it for her."

Margaret bent over the child, murmuring to it some homely words of endearment.

The baby had intended to cry, but it smiled instead.

"I 'll fetch yir ba', ma bonny bairn," she said.

She stepped out from the porch and followed the ball, which was trickling down the slight incline towards the fuchsia hedge behind which Sandy was hidden.

Margaret walked with a certain stateliness of carriage, and all her movements were deliberate. The ball had reached the fringe of crimson flowers which swept the ground at the edge of the pathway, and she was about to stoop to pick it up, when a hand was thrust suddenly out and it disappeared from view.

"Maircy me," she exclaimed, and drew herself up indignantly. "Wha 's hidin' a'hint they busses. Come oot!"

There was no answer. Only the sound of a heavy boot being scraped along the gravel.

With a swift step Margaret skirted the fuchsia hedge and came face to face with the culprit. He was caught red-handed with the ball in his grasp. He wore an expression of

mingled fright and eager excitement, and looked as if he would like to run away.

“Sandy MacNab!” exclaimed Margaret in astonishment. “Whatever are ye daen’ here, stealin’ ba’s in a leddy’s gairden like ony——”

“Wheesht, Marget, wheesht,” pleaded Sandy, and he blurted out his message. Coming direct from Sir Andrew, it gained a hearing which his own affairs certainly would not have done.

Margaret’s ready brain had grasped the situation long before Sandy’s halting tongue had expressed it in words.

When he was about to follow her down the path which led to the back door she stopped, and waved him aside.

“Ye ’re no wanted here, Sandy MacNab,” she said firmly. “Awa’ back tae Sir Andry. Maybe ye ’ll hae tae rin for the doctor.” And Sandy, who had a vague notion sometimes that he was always running to do other people’s bidding, obeyed her.

It did not take Margaret long to make her preparations. It was a time-honoured custom

at Pittivie that a guest chamber should always be ready for any stray visitor. In that sparsely populated neighbourhood it was not often required, for Sir Andrew and his wife did not pay much attention to the claims of society.

Margaret called up the servants, and directed them what to do. Then she made her way towards the hall, which ran the entire length of the inhabited portion of the castle, and from it opened the folding doors into the porch where Lady Brewster and Mrs. Adair were still sitting.

Like most old Scotch houses of its kind, the rooms at Pittivie opened one out of the other. The hall was used as a sitting-room, but it was also the thoroughfare through which every one must pass who wished to gain access to any other part of the house. A curious corkscrew stair at one end wound upwards to the floors above. It had an erratic way of appearing and disappearing through slits in the massive thickness of the walls, which enabled any one from the second or third floor to look down into the hall below.

Margaret knew that it was time to warn Lady Brewster of what had happened. Sir Andrew might be expected to appear at any moment, and the injured man would have to be brought through the garden, and into the house by way of the porch.

The manner in which Margaret's announcement was received was characteristic of the position she occupied in the family.

Lady Brewster turned to her with a look of consternation.

"What are we to do?" she exclaimed, her vivacity giving place to an expression of child-like helplessness. "Oh, Margaret, I can't bear accidents, or seeing dreadful things. Please put me where I can't see anything."

"Nae fear, ma leddy," said Margaret soothingly. "Ye 'll jist step ben tae yir ain room. Ye 're safe there."

She gathered up the silks and embroidery which had fallen from Lady Brewster's lap, and followed her into the house.

A minute or two later she came back to find Mrs. Adair making havoc of the furniture,

She had pushed back the chairs and spinning-wheel, and had swept aside all obstacles which might be likely to get in the way.

"How dreadful, Margaret," she exclaimed.

She stooped and lifted the child in her arms.

"Do you think the man is very badly hurt?"

Margaret did not answer. She was looking out across the garden.

"I 'm thinkin' that 's Sir Andry at the gate," she said. "He 'll want tae ken if it 's a' richt."

"I 'll tell him," said Nanny, impulsively.

She gave the baby to Margaret, and ran quickly down the pathway and tried the door, which had been opened by some one from without and then shut again. It resisted at first, then gave way, and Sir Andrew's face looked anxiously round the corner.

His expression changed at sight of her.

"You, Nanny?" he said. "That 's all right. Have you got Lulu out of the way?"

"She 's safe in her own room," answered Nanny.

Her eyes went past him to the group of men gathered round the hand-cart. She could

only partly see the figure lying on it. Some one had thrown a coat over the injured man's shoulders, and his head was turned away from her.

"Is he still unconscious?" she asked in a low voice. "He is so horribly still."

"He seems pretty bad," said Sir Andrew, "but he showed signs of coming round as we lifted him up. He 's gone off again, I think."

"How are you going to get through the door? It 's too narrow for the cart," said Nanny.

Sir Andrew glanced at the fishermen.

"They might sling their nets together and make a kind of hammock. It would shake him less if they carried him that way."

He beckoned to one of the men and explained to him what he wanted him to do.

The strongest of the nets was folded into a square. It was slipped carefully under the man's head and shoulders until his whole body rested upon it, and then the men lifted the knotted ends and slung them across their shoulders.

Nanny stood beside the door holding it open at its widest, and watched them slowly raise their burden. They moved awkwardly. She set her teeth and a little shiver ran through her at each laboured movement.

“Oh, oh!” she exclaimed sharply, as one of the bearers caught his boot on the stone step and stumbled. “Do take care! A little sideways. You can’t all squeeze through together.”

She was so engrossed in watching the men that she had barely glanced at the burden they carried until they halted for a moment immediately opposite her.

“You’ve got his feet too high,” said Sir Andrew. “Lower a little in front.”

He went down and drew back the coat which had fallen over the man’s face.

The face was turned towards Nanny. It was ghastly pale and smeared with blood on the cheek and forehead.

She gave a sharp cry, and then put her hand quickly over her mouth. The procession moved on with shuffling feet up the pathway, and she stood staring after it with terrified

eyes. A sickening sensation of faintness began to creep over her. The flowers and the sunshine and the streaks of blue sea became a blurred jumble of crimson and blue and yellow. She knew if she tried to take a step forward her limbs would give way under her. Then, through the mist of half-consciousness, she saw Margaret coming towards her with the child in her arms.

"I'm wanted," said Margaret. "An' I canna leave the bairn——"

She stopped at the sight of Nanny's face.

"Dear, dear!" she exclaimed. "Ye 're fair upset, an' nae wunner."

A garden seat stood near. Margaret put her strong arm round Nanny's waist and led her to it.

"Sit doon," she said firmly.

Nanny closed her eyes for a moment or two, then she looked up and gave herself a shake.

"Give me baby," she said. "I'm all right now. Go back! Hurry, Margaret! They won't know what to do without you."

Margaret hesitated.

“Go, go!” cried Nanny. “I know why you’re waiting. You think I’ll let the baby fall, or do something dreadful. I won’t! I’m not a bit faint. Go!”

And reluctantly Margaret went.

Nanny buried her face against the child’s soft down of curls, and drew a long quivering breath. Then she fell to kissing its little face, its soft white neck and clinging arms passionately, almost fiercely. She pressed it closer and closer against her bosom.

“Baby, baby! What are we to do?” she sobbed brokenly. “He’s going to die, baby—He’s going to die.”

The child gave a plaintive cry. The vehement outburst of love frightened it.

Nanny held it from her and devoured each tiny feature, each curve and line of the baby face, with hungry eyes.

“You’re all me! me! me!” she whispered under her breath. “If only you were n’t. There is n’t one little bit of you that’s like him. What am I to do if he dies—Oh, baby, what am I to do?”

CHAPTER II

SUSPENSE

AFTER the injured man had been carried to the room prepared for him, and the heavy tramp of the men who had borne him there had died away, an ominous silence settled down over the house.

As Margaret had predicted, Sandy had been sent for the doctor, and by a piece of good luck had fallen in with him not far from the castle gates.

His visit lasted a long time. A lifetime it seemed to Nanny. She had followed him as he hurried through the garden, and now sat in the deserted hall with the drowsy child in her arms and watched the door through which he had disappeared.

It was horrible to have to sit still and do nothing.

To Nanny, with her intense vitality and the instinctive impulse to throw herself into the

midst of whatever was going on around her, it was almost unbearable. If only she could see what was happening behind that closed door! If only she could hear the sound of voices it would not be so bad! It was the absolute silence which frightened her.

The old hall took on a feeling of gloom, and the familiar outlines of the furniture began to grow dim in the falling dusk. Through the open windows the shrill cries of the sea-gulls sounded harshly, and there was a mournful note in the beat of the waves washing against the rocks at the foot of the castle cliff.

At last the door opened and Sir Andrew and the doctor came out. Nanny leaned back behind a great bowl of flowers and waited in a fever of anxiety to hear what they would say.

They stood some distance from her and spoke in lowered voices, so that only a word here and there reached her. Her impatience almost mastered her discretion, for it was never Nanny's way to sit still and wait for anything. She was on the point of jumping up

and going to speak to them when they moved across the hall towards the door leading into the garden. She heard the doctor say distinctly:

“Would you like me to send notice of this to the police, or to make any enquiries for you, Sir Andrew?”

Sir Andrew hesitated.

“I don’t know who the man is, and I’m responsible,” he said. “What do you think?”

The doctor had a brusque, self-confident manner.

“We can wait and see how he is in the morning,” he said, and then followed something which Nanny could not catch, and she saw Sir Andrew go with him out of the house.

She sat on, rocking the child gently backwards and forwards. She bent to kiss it, not fiercely this time, but with a little quiver on her lips.

“We can wait and see how he is in the morning.”

The doctor’s words came back to her and brought some kind of comfort.

“If they can wait until the morning, it can’t

be so very, very bad, my sweet," she murmured.

The weight of the child began to grow heavy in her arms, and it was long past the time when it ought to be in bed. She rose, and hushing its sleepy cry, carried it upstairs.

Life at Pittivie was very simple, and she was accustomed to taking care of the baby herself, but Margaret always put it to bed. The task of washing and undressing a tired child, grown fretful at being put out of its usual routine, was a little difficult.

"She 's cross because she 's hungry," concluded Nanny, looking uneasily at the preparations placed ready for the child's supper. "But I don't know how to make her food. How stupid of me never to have learned."

She was hesitating as to what she ought to do when the door opened and Margaret came in.

Margaret looked round at the general disorder, at the small garments thrown wildly here and there, and at the bath water splashed over on to the floor, and then at Nanny.

"I could na come sooner," she said apologetically.

The colour leaped into Nanny's cheeks.

"Margaret," she said, watching her face eagerly. "How—how 's the man?"

"No very weel," said Margaret. "The doctor's gied him somethin' tae keep doon the pain."

"Pain!" repeated Nanny, and gave a shiver. "How can you talk about it so quietly. Is the pain very bad? Who 's taking care of him? Why have you left him?"

Margaret was accustomed to Nanny's impetuosity. She answered the stream of questions gently.

"Ye needna' fear, mem, he 'll no dee. And it 's time for yir dinner, mem. Leave the bairn wi' me. I 've leisure noo to see tae the dear lamb's supper."

"I don't want any dinner," said Nanny, impatiently.

"Dear, dear!" exclaimed Margaret in astonishment. "What ails ye? Sir Andry 's sittin' wi the puir man, an' her leddyship 's no

comin' oot o' her room. Deed, mem, ye mun eat yir dinner," she concluded firmly.

Without troubling to change her dress, Nanny went down to the deserted dining-room and made a pretence of eating. She felt restless and miserable. An overwhelming weight lay on her conscience, and the two empty chairs which stood at either end of the table seemed to be imbued with life, and to watch every mouthful she tried to swallow, with reproach. How often she had sat there, laughing and talking to Sir Andrew and Lulu. How kind they had always been to her and to her child; how trusting. Giving her ungrudgingly the shelter of their home and their love, and never questioning or doubting her right to either.

It was no use. She could not eat. She pushed her plate aside and rose and left the room. Uncertainty of action was hateful to her and she could not make up her mind what to do.

She wandered out into the garden and threaded her way among the flower beds and

the hedges of old-fashioned pink and white roses to where a low wall skirted the edge of the cliff. The wind had fallen, and not a breath of air stirred the surface of the water. The twilight, which in that northern land would but deepen into a soft dusk as the night crept on, lay over land and sea, broken only by the intermittent flash from the great lighthouse on the Mary Isle, which lay far out in the middle of the broad Firth.

She sat down on the edge of the wall and watched it. It was like a great heart pulsing out its throb of warning across the dark waters. Almost mechanically she began to count each second of time. The peacefulness of the night soothed her. Here, under the stillness of the quiet skies, with the scent of the sleeping flowers around her and the great expanse of water stretching away from under her feet into the shadowy dimness, the burden which had haunted her all the evening seemed to slip away from her; the certainty of what she ought to do, stood out plainly against the horizon of her mental vision.

She clasped her hands tightly together, as though holding on to the strength of a sudden resolution.

“I will count twenty flashes,” she murmured, fixing her eyes steadily on the distant light. “And then—then I will go in and tell them.”

CHAPTER III

NANNY'S CONFESSION

LADY BREWSTER had retired to bed. She always did so when anything occurred to upset the ordinary routine of the household.

A shaded lamp threw a soft glow over the embroidered coverlet of her bed. Her pretty figure was wrapped in a becoming negligee. She had finished her dinner, and she leaned back against her high pillows and played with the heavy rings on her fingers.

She was not a heartless woman, but she was incapable of facing any form of physical suffering. Away from the sight and hearing of it, her natural buoyancy of spirit quickly asserted itself, and enabled her to throw off unpleasant memories with astonishing rapidity.

She stopped playing with her rings at the sound of a sharp knock at the door, and as

Nanny entered her dark eyes lighted up, and she held out her hands.

"I've been longing for you," she cried plaintively. "I thought you were never coming."

"I'm sorry," said Nanny.

Lady Brewster leaned back with a sigh of relief.

"It's nice to have some one to talk to," she said. "And I'm not frightened now. Andrew came in a few minutes ago to tell me I need n't be. He says the man is not so badly hurt after all. He's quite quiet. They think he's asleep."

"Oh, do they?" said Nanny, dubiously.

She knew by experience that Sir Andrew would only tell his wife as much of the truth as he thought it was good for her to know.

She looked round the comfortable room. Although it was summer a wood fire burnt on the hearth. Little tongues of flame spurted out from the dry logs and lighted up the dark corners of the wainscotted walls.

"You look nice and cheerful in here," she

said, sitting down on the edge of the bed.
“Margaret was right to take you away.”

“I'm such a coward,” murmured Lady Brewster.

Nanny was very fond of her cousin's wife, and her peculiarities of temperament never roused in her any feeling of contempt. Lulu was always sympathetic; she never thought evil of any one or criticised their actions.

“Nanny, you are not comfortable there,” said Lulu. “Do pull in a chair and look as though you were going to stay.”

Nanny paid no attention to the suggestion and continued to sit where she was. She was watching the reflection of the firelight dancing on the fluted sides of the old-fashioned brass grate and did not even turn her head.

“Lulu,” she said abruptly. “Do you remember how long ago it is since I came here?”

Lady Brewster clasped her hands behind her head; she gazed upwards abstractedly.

“I never remember dates,” she said.

“It was in February,” said Nanny. “More than six months ago.”

"Of course I remember about your coming," exclaimed Lulu, dropping her arms and speaking with animation. "It was a bitter cold night and the wind was driving the sleet against the windows and the roar of the sea was deafening. When a storm comes I'm always terrified that the castle will tumble down."

"Yes," said Nanny, "I remember. It was a terrible night."

"I don't mind the storms when Andrew's at home, but he had gone to fetch you. He was away for days—nearly a whole week."

"Poor Lulu, and it was my fault," said Nanny. "But if Andrew had n't come then, I should never have been here."

"I know," said Lady Brewster. "It was a good thing he did go. I never saw such a poor thing as you were that night when you arrived. And the baby!" She threw out her arms with a gesture of horror. "I was afraid to touch her. I would n't, for days. She hardly seemed to have any life in her little body."

"She was so young; such a tiny mite," murmured Nanny.

She smoothed the coverlet absently with her hand as she spoke. She turned her head still more aside, so that Lady Brewster could see only the outline of her cheek and ear.

"Lulu," she continued in a low tone, "when I feel things most, I can't express them in the way I want to; but I've often and often tried to tell you and Andrew how I love you for being what you were to me then."

A little catch came in her throat. "I shall never forget it."

Lady Brewster caught her hand and tried to draw her towards her, but Nanny resisted.

"No," she said, "you must let me speak just this once. My heart has often ached trying to tell you what I felt."

Lady Brewster sank back against the pillows.

"Nanny, what's the matter with you to-night? You're not like yourself. You're exaggerating things absurdly. There was no goodness in what we did. We love you! We would like you to live with us always."

Nanny twisted the gold band on the finger of her left hand round and round. It was the

only ring she wore. Her dress was plain almost to severity and showed that she was in mourning.

Turning her head for the first time, she looked full into the dark eyes which were watching her questioningly.

"Lulu, why have you never asked me about—Jim?" she said abruptly.

For a second Lady Brewster's glance fell. She flushed a little and then met Nanny's eyes frankly.

"Because Andrew said I was not to," she answered.

"And Andrew? Why did he never ask me about him?"

"Andrew said if there was anything he ought to know, you would tell him yourself. He said he would wait. That's Andrew's way, you know. He always trusts people."

"And I told him nothing," said Nanny, bitterly. "I allowed him to bring me here, and give me the shelter of his home, and I never gave him any confidence in return. I've behaved horribly to you both. No! no!

Don't interrupt me. Don't try to make the best of me. I want to put things before you as they really are. When I came here that time after father died, I ought to have told you about Jim, but I did n't. I let things slip along and said nothing, and allowed you to think what you liked, and of course you thought good of me. You always do—both you and Andrew."

"Nanny, Nanny!" broke in Lady Brewster. "Don't talk in that way. It's all nonsense. Why should we ever have thought anything but good of you? There was no reason to think badly of you."

"No reason?" repeated Nanny. "It's you who are talking nonsense, Lulu—you know you are. You're only doing it because you can't bear to hurt me. What do people generally think, if a woman leaves her husband and goes back to her father's house, and the husband starts off to the end of the world with no definite idea of when he means to return! Don't you think they would imagine there was something wrong?"

“Your father was ill, and there was no one to take care of him. I don’t think there was anything extraordinary in his wanting to leave you with him.”

“Father’s illness had nothing to do with it,” said Nanny, resolutely. “As a matter of fact, he was n’t ill then. No—it was my own doing, going back to him. It was in August last year, and he was n’t ill, not to be anxious about, until that time in February.”

“And then you sent for Andrew?” said Lady Brewster.

“Yes; I sent for Andrew. But—he came too late. Father was too ill to recognise him.”

Neither woman spoke for some minutes. Then Lady Brewster said hesitatingly:

“Nanny, I have wondered—a tiny little bit sometimes, why *he* did n’t come back then. Your husband, I mean. He must have known you would be unhappy. And then—there was the baby.”

Nanny got up abruptly and went towards the fireplace.

"You never saw Jim, Lulu, did you?" she asked, in a strained voice unlike her own.

"No, neither Andrew nor I have ever seen him," said Lady Brewster. "Why, Nanny, we never heard of your marriage until it was all over."

"He rented the shooting from father," said Nanny, rather irrelevantly. "I don't believe he really wanted it, but it gave him anchorage for the yacht."

A splinter of wood projected from one of the bars of the grate. She touched it with the toe of her shoe and it broke off and fell on to the hearth. The smell of the burning wood brought back to her with a twinge of pain the memory of her Highland home; it reminded her of the scent of burning peat.

A vision came between her and the flickering firelight. She saw the old white-washed house lying in the hollow of the narrow glen, the steep pathway with its many twists and turns leading down to the sandy beach; and in the bay, a big steam yacht lying at anchor under the lee of the towering cliffs.

Lady Brewster's voice broke in on her dream.

"Do take the tongs, Nanny, and push that piece of wood under the grate."

Nanny did as she was asked. She straightened herself slowly and then walked deliberately across the room and took one of the pretty fragile hands which lay on the coverlet and held it tightly in hers.

"Lulu," she said, "I've been trying all these months—ever since I went back to father,—to make myself think that what I did was right. But I don't believe it was."

"Would it comfort you to tell me about it?" said Lulu.

"I must tell you," answered Nanny. "It's come to the time when I must."

She went on, speaking rapidly, not giving herself the chance of drawing back.

"I had a dreadful quarrel with Jim and I left him. I went back to father when I was too angry to know whether I was doing right or wrong. Jim was very angry too—angrier perhaps than I was, but he showed it differ-

ently, and he never tried to prevent my going. That drove me wild! I thought I hated him! He allowed me to have my own way at first, and stay with father; then he suggested that we should meet somewhere and come to an arrangement. I refused to see him, and I wrote him a horrid letter. I said cruel, ungenerous things in it. It was a wicked letter, because I did n't believe the things I said in it were really true. He took no notice of it, except to send me a stiff little note to say that he was going abroad, that his bankers would have his address, and that I might draw on them for any money I wanted. Very soon after that I saw in the papers a notice about the yacht—the *Katinata*. It had sailed from Cowes, so I knew he had gone."

"Poor Nanny," murmured Lady Brewster. "I 'm so sorry. I think he 's been rather hard. Why has he stayed away so long? He might have come back after the baby was born. He ought to have come back then."

"I never told him anything about it," faltered Nanny.

"Never told him!" echoed Lady Brewster, sitting suddenly upright, her dark eyes opened wide with astonishment. "Do you mean to say that he does n't know about the child?"

Nanny's head drooped.

"When I went away first I was so angry and—I never thought of such a thing. When I knew, I was frightened. I dare n't tell him. Oh, it was all wretched and miserable, and I was so unhappy. I fretted myself ill, and then baby was born, and then—I was more frightened because he had never written, and I thought he would never forgive me, and I did not know where he was—and——"

Her voice ended in a sob.

"Don't cry," pleaded Lulu, melting into tears herself. "It will all come right. We will make it come right."

"I don't know—I don't deserve that it should. I have n't told you the worst yet. He's here—in the house. It was Jim who was thrown out of the motor."

CHAPTER IV

THE EXPLANATION OF—WHY!

THERE was dead silence in the room for some moments. It was broken by Lady Brewster, who said solemnly:

“Nanny, you know I’ve always said I loathed motors. I shall never say that again.”

Nanny turned on her passionately.

“Lulu, how can you? You don’t know what you are saying. It’s ghastly—horrible! You did n’t see him brought in. He looked as if he were dead.”

She began to walk up and down like a wild thing caged in within four walls. Then she came back to the bed, and threw herself down beside it.

“If I could go to him—but I can’t! They would n’t let me. He’s not conscious. He may die and never know what I feel. What am I to do?”

“You can’t go to him, dear. You must have patience,” said Lulu, soothingly. “They would not let you see him even if he were conscious. He is to be kept absolutely quiet, the doctor says.”

Nanny moved her head restlessly and moaned.

“And you know,” continued Lulu, “I don’t believe Andrew was pretending when he said he did n’t think he was so very bad. Oh, yes! Andrew tries to keep disagreeable things from me. I know that just as well as you do. But this time I think he was speaking the truth.”

Nanny pushed back the hair from her forehead and looked up.

“Think of it, Lulu! I have n’t seen him; I have n’t heard his voice; I have n’t felt the touch of his hand for more than a whole long year. And to know that he is so near, and that I can’t go to him! I’ve been thinking of all kinds of things. Perhaps he had found out where I was. He may have been coming to see me.—And now it’s too

late! I may never be able to explain. Never, never!"

Lulu was accustomed to be comforted with small comforts. She poured some eau-de-cologne on her handkerchief and passed her fingers softly backwards and forwards through the thick waves of Nanny's hair.

The magnetism of her touch had its effect. Nanny lay still.

"You loved him very dearly?" Lulu whispered presently.

"Loved him?" Nanny gave a long sigh. "He was everything to me."

"But why——?"

Lulu hesitated.

Nanny knew the question which hovered on her lips. It must be answered sooner or later.

"Why did I leave him?"

She raised her head for a moment, then dropped it again.

"I'll tell you everything—then you will understand. I suppose it was my fault. I must have behaved like a fool; but I was so

young, and I knew so little; and I loved him so. It was such a big love. I did n't know what to do with it. It ran away with me."

Lulu's hand paused in its slow, monotonous movement, but Nanny caught it impulsively.

"Don't stop," she pleaded. "It helps to put my thoughts straight. My head 's so hot and everything whirls about in a kind of maze. I don't know where to begin."

"I 'll tell you," said Lulu. "It always saves time when the person you 're trying to explain a thing to tells you what they want to know. Begin where Jim married you and took you away in his yacht, and we all thought he had carried you off into another world, and would never bring you back again."

"I wish he had n't," sighed Nanny. "It was such a beautiful world."

She looked up eagerly, with wide, questioning eyes.

"Why did he marry *me*? He must have known such heaps of women before he met me. Women who were pretty and clever and amusing, and knew how to make a man love

them; and I was only a little wild thing who had hardly ever been outside our own glens. Why did he choose me?"

Lulu looked down into the upturned face. She took Nanny's chin in the curve of her hand.

"You are the prettiest, most maddening little thing that was ever sent into the world to turn a man's head," she said. "Tell me about that time on the yacht?"

Nanny gave another long, long sigh.

"It was heaven! I had never imagined that the world was so full of beautiful things. It was like a glorious dream, marching on and on, and always something more beautiful and more wonderful waiting to open up before us. There were no sordid worries or bothers. The yacht was big enough to take us wherever we wanted to go. It was our home for nearly two years. Jim left the army, you know, before he married."

She paused a moment, then went on again with hurrying breath.

"An idea came to me quite suddenly one

day. It makes me sick now when I remember it was my own doing. I told Jim I wanted to go home, so as to have a London season. Well, we went. Jim was n't very keen about it, but I made up my mind it was the one thing of all things I wanted, and I thought every fancy I took was to be gratified; so I insisted, and in the end he said, 'All right.'

"Jim has a house in town, but it wasn't worth while opening it up, for the season was pretty well on before we got back, so we took rooms at the Hyde Park Hotel and settled down there.

"I thought I was going to have such a good time, and so I did at first. I had the loveliest frocks! Oh!"

She drew in a breath sharply.

"You know there is something in clothes, Lulu! When they're just right they make you feel good inside and out. I felt like that one afternoon when I came into our sitting-room ready to go down to Hurlingham with Jim. The motor was at the door; he had bought me a beauty; and I ran in quickly,

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because I had kept him waiting. He was standing by the window talking to a woman I had never seen before, and the light was falling full on her face. She was lovely! quite, quite lovely, and she was beautifully dressed. Not in an ordinary kind of way. I can't describe it, it was too subtle.

"She was looking up at him, and I saw the expression in her eyes. Lulu, I could have killed her that very minute, just where she stood!

"Jim introduced her to me.

"'This is an old friend of mine, Nanny, who wants to make your acquaintance,' he said. 'Mrs.——'"

Nanny choked back the name which rose to her lips. An instinct of loyalty restrained her. For Jim's sake she would not tell Lulu Mrs. Maynard's name.

But Lulu understood.

"Yes?" she said, interrogatively. "Don't trouble to explain. I know you don't want to say it. It tastes nasty, does n't it?"

Nanny's eyes hardened.

"I think from that very moment a devil entered into me. Lulu, that woman fastened on my life like a blight—a pestilence. She was one of those vampires of society who suck the happiness out of other women's lives. It began from that first day when she went down to Hurlingham with us."

"Why did you ask her to go?" said Lulu.

"Ask her?" Nanny laughed scornfully. "She never asked for things—she took them! I don't know how she did it; I really don't. Even looking back now I can't understand it. If I'd known, I'd have fought her on her own ground, but she took all the fight out of me. She shrivelled me up. She made me feel a dummy—a thing that could only fume with impotent rage and do nothing. Of course I went the wrong way with Jim. I told him straight out at once that I did n't like her, and I kept on saying it, until he must have been sick of the subject. He laughed at me at first, then he got vexed and rather hurt, and said I was n't kind, and that

she had had a lot of trouble, and it was a shame to keep all the best things to ourselves and not give some one else a good time now and then. Now and then! It was always. And she was so clever, she never let him see what she was aiming for until she 'd got it.

“One day things came to a climax, and I lost my temper completely. I threw it right in his teeth that his friendship for her was an insult to me. Oh! I can remember that scene! How it comes back! He went as white as a sheet. I never saw him really angry before. He took me by the shoulders and shook me. Yes—shook me! I did n't mind. I liked it! I felt I had roused him at last. He dared me to repeat what I had said, and I looked him in the face and repeated every word over again deliberately. He dropped his hands from my shoulders and went out of the room without saying a single word—not one!”

Nanny's voice broke in a sob.

“That was the hard part of it. He would n't explain or argue or contradict me. I suppose he thought I ought to take everything on trust.

It was his silence that I could not fight against. I did n't want to hear what she had been to him in the past, but I would not have her claim his present. What right had she to make claims on him? And why did he give in to her?"

Nanny beat her hands passionately on the silk coverlet.

"That was what I wanted to know. And I had a right to know."

Lulu took the little angry hands in hers.

"You will know, Nanny—quite soon. It will be cleared up now. He was coming to see you and make everything right. Tell me the whole story. You 'll feel better afterwards. You 've been eating your poor heart out all alone."

"Since that scene with Jim, I don't think I've cared much whether I had a heart or not," sighed Nanny. "It did n't seem much use. Everything went wrong after that. We were always at cross-purposes. We left town at the end of July and picked up the yacht at Cowes. It was a tremendously gay season, you remem-

ber. Foreign Royalties were there, and heaps of our own Royalties, of course, and everybody that was anybody. Jim is pretty well known at Cowes, and all during the race week he was very busy, and we entertained a good deal one way and another. We lived on board the *Katinata*, but he had his racing cutter down there as well. It would have been perfect if we 'd been friends the way we used to be, but it was hateful! She was there! And I was more at her mercy than I was in town. Jim was away so much. He was always with the racing set, and she simply walked over me. She made as much use of the yacht as if it had been her own. She gave orders as if they came from Jim, but I 'm quite sure he never knew anything about them.

“At the back of all my misery during that time was the certainty that after it was over I would get rid of her. We were to go up to Scotland after Cowes to stay with father for a month's shooting, and she could n't follow us there. It had been arranged ages before. We were to cruise round by the south of England

and up to the Highlands that way. The last night came, and Jim had a big farewell dinner on board. The yacht looked lovely. A part of the deck had been fitted up as a sitting-out room after dinner, and there were masses of flowers everywhere, and music, and the rigging was lit up with soft-coloured lights. For the first time for weeks I felt like my old self. She was there, but I did n't care. Tomorrow we would be gone. Every one said such charming things to me as I stood at the top of the steps and bade good-night to each guest as they left. I laughed back answers and wondered if any of them had the least idea how glad I was to see the last of them.

“*She* came up to me at the end, smiling. She might have been an angel, and she had a voice like an angel's. I can hear it now.

“‘This is not good-bye, Mrs. Adair. Your husband has arranged such a nice surprise. I'm going to join you on your trip. So kind of him. I could n't refuse.’—And she was gone, before I could find words to answer her.”

Nanny threw back her head, her eyes flashing, two patches of vivid scarlet burning on either cheek.

“It was a lie! I knew it was a lie! Jim had n’t asked her to go, but he had n’t refused to take her, and that was just as bad.

“I made up my mind that instant what I would do. I went down to my cabin and packed my clothes. I did everything myself. I rang for my maid first, and told her to go to bed; then I was free to do what I liked.

“When Jim came to find me, I would n’t listen to a word he had to say. I told him that I was going back to father. I had looked up my trains north. I had ordered the launch to take me ashore in the morning. There was nothing left for him to do at all! I told him I should take my own way whether he liked it or not. And, Lulu, he let me go. He never tried to prevent me by one single sign or look, to show that he cared whether I went or stayed. That cut me to the heart more than anything that he could have done or said.”

The tears were running down Lulu's cheeks. With swift compunction Nanny threw her arms round her neck.

"Don't! I'm not worth crying about. I'm selfish and everything that's horrid to drag you into my miserable troubles. But I had to tell you. I could n't keep it from you. I'll go away now. I'll go away this very minute. There's nothing more now to tell. Nothing to do now except—wait."

She gave a dreary sob, and her arms fell to her side.

There was a knock at the door, and Margaret came in with a small tray in her hand, on which was a cup and saucer and a little brown jug.

Lady Brewster wiped her eyes hastily and tucked her wet handkerchief under the pillow. Nanny bent down and kissed her.

"I know what that little brown jug means," she said. "Bed-time, and Margaret's come to tuck you up."

Before Lulu could whisper a last word of comfort, she had left the room.

In the hall she was surprised to find Sir Andrew standing by the fireplace. The light of a smouldering log threw up a dull glow on his strongly marked features. He held something in his hand, which he was turning over with an expression of uncertainty, and he looked troubled.

Quick to take alarm, Nanny came swiftly across to where he stood.

“Is he worse? What is the matter? Why are you looking so anxious?” she asked.

She glanced down and saw what he held,—a bulky pocket-book. It was her husband’s. It was not new. It had seen some service, and at the sight of it a tightness came round her heart, and she laid her hand on the broad ledge of the mantelpiece to steady herself.

“No, he’s no worse,” said Sir Andrew. “The doctor’s with him just now. He said he’d look in the last thing, and he thinks, if anything, he’s a shade better. But I want your advice, Nanny. It’s like this. The man’s not in a state to give an account of himself. He must have been going somewhere

when the accident happened. He must have people belonging to him. We 'll have to find out who they are, and let them know. And—I 'd very much like to know who the man is himself."

He again turned over the book.

"One has a certain delicacy in prying into a man's affairs, but I think we are justified in looking through this to find out who he is."

From the other end of the hall came the sound of a door being opened and shut, and Sir Andrew looked up to see the doctor coming towards him.

The doctor bowed to Nanny.

"Can you spare a few minutes, Sir Andrew?" he said. "Nothing serious. My patient's too big for me, and I want your help."

Sir Andrew gave the pocket-book into Nanny's hand.

"We will settle that when I come back," he said, and left her.

Nanny touched the book tenderly. She held it against her bosom as if it were a living

thing, and kissed the little buckle of the strap, which Jim's fingers must have touched so lately. Tears blurred her sight as she pressed her lips against its leather cover.

Every hard thought of him died out of her heart.

She sat down in a low chair by the fireplace with the book clasped in her hands. Should she open it or not? she asked herself. Perhaps Andrew would say that they must, even after he had heard what she had to tell him. He might insist that it was right to find out where Jim was going, in case it might cause trouble or inconvenience to any one. He was particular about things like that. She fingered the fastening hesitatingly. If the book was to be opened, she must do it herself. She could not bear to see any one else touch it. It opened so easily; the letters and papers were almost tumbling out of it. She looked at each in turn as they came uppermost and laid them in a heap on her lap.

Bills! Some of them not opened. Jim must have been in a great hurry, for he was an or-

derly person. A couple of letters from the Captain of the yacht. The *Katinata* had evidently just returned from a long cruise. She smiled at Captain Cragg's little cramped handwriting. The sight of it cheered her like the face of an old friend. A telegram! She glanced at the signature. It was from his valet—so he still had Griffiths? It was about trains and luggage. Griffiths was to be ready to join his master as soon as he received definite orders where to go.

Nanny's heart beat more quickly. Jim must have been on his way to find her! He would n't know his plans until he had seen her. It looked as if he had been undecided about something, and Jim's plans as a rule were never undecided.

More letters! This time all the same size. Big, square envelopes addressed in a woman's handwriting to Captain Adair at a well-known London club. She felt her whole body stiffen as Mrs. Maynard's handwriting danced up and down before her eyes. One, two, three! She counted the letters deliberately. She

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bent her head and examined the dates and the post-marks. They had all been written within the last few days, and from some place not twenty miles from where she was sitting at that moment.

A fury of anger swept over her. Jim had not been coming to find his wife. He had been hurrying to the side of that other woman! She never stopped to think or to calculate. She crushed the letters, the papers, the book—everything, into a heap, and springing to her feet flung them down amongst the smouldering logs, and catching up some splinters of dry wood thrust them into the grate. In a few seconds the flames were roaring up the chimney, and Nanny stood and watched them with a flame a thousand times hotter surging through her veins.

That night, before she went to bed, she told Sir Andrew the story of her married life, but this time there were no tears or repentance or heart-broken regrets. She told him the dry, bare facts, and nothing more.

Sir Andrew marvelled at the want of feeling

she showed. It was unlike her in every way. He did not know the tremendous strain she put upon herself to appear cold and indifferent. During the silent hours of the night when he sat watching in the sick-room, he mused long and painfully over what he had heard. His kind heart ached for Nanny. Again and again his glance wandered to the figure on the bed. His eyes seldom left the man's face. There were conflicting elements in the story which he could not understand. He was trying to piece them together according to his own knowledge of human nature.

"Nanny's husband," he mused. "And—he's not a bad lot," he said to himself more than once. "I'm seldom mistaken in judging a man by his face. There's something in the background that he won't give away, something which prevents him from being able to right himself in Nanny's eyes. He's working on the wrong tack, probably, but he's not a bad lot. I'll swear to that. It's a queer business, and I wish I knew the rights of it."

For the present, he was not called upon to

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make any decision as to whether he should interfere in the matter or not. Nanny's impulsive act in burning the pocket-book, had simplified the situation so far, that until Jim Adair came to his senses and was able to give his own explanation of himself, all that Sir Andrew could do was to see that he was properly cared for.

CHAPTER V

THE MYSTERY FORESHADOWED

PERHAPS it was just as well that when Jim Adair recovered consciousness for the first time, he was alone in the room with Margaret. For the best part of two days he had lain in a state of dazed stupor, only roused at intervals to take the nourishment necessary to keep up his strength.

“Nothing to be alarmed about,” asserted the self-confident doctor. “The wound in his head has caused slight concussion. The stupor will wear off by degrees. He’s had a bad shaking and that hand also will take some time to heal, but he’ll come round all right. Keep him quiet. Never saw a man with a finer physique in my life.”

It was late in the afternoon, and Margaret was sitting by the open window of the sick-room, knitting a child’s white sock. Her

needles moved noiselessly. The sunlight glinted on their sharp steel points as they glanced in and out of the soft wool.

She had been watching her patient for some time with more than usual attention. Presently she rose and moved over to the bed. The eyes that looked up at her from the pillow wore a puzzled expression, but they were quite sane and intelligent.

Margaret had been told who her patient was. Sir Andrew had said it was better that she should know, and Nanny had seen the wisdom of his advice. Local gossip regarding the accident and the stranger at the castle was unavoidable, but if Margaret knew the truth, no annoyance would result from it.

She had listened to what had been told her in grave silence, and her own shrewd common-sense had supplied what had been left unsaid.

"Ye 've had a fine sleep," she said, looking down at the puzzled eyes staring back at her.

Jim moved his head, and the acute consciousness of pain ran through every nerve of his body.

“What does it all mean?” he murmured feebly.

Margaret poured some drops into a medicine glass and filled it up with water. When she held it to his lips he drank the dose obediently. He lay quite still afterwards, and his eyes wandered slowly round the room. It was strange to him, and yet one or two objects in it were familiar. A travelling case, evidently packed with the intention of supplying the owner's wants for a few days' absence had been found in the wrecked car, and Jim recognised various articles in the shape of brushes and bottles neatly arranged on the dressing-table.

His eyes came back to Margaret's face.

“That stuff 's cleared my head a bit. Would you mind sitting down beside me and telling me where I am?” he asked in a thick voice. “There was a smash, was n't there? What happened?”

Margaret knew that it would do him no harm to listen to a few minutes' explanation. If she did not satisfy him he would only tire

his brain in trying to work out an explanation for himself. Margaret's speech was slow and deliberate, like everything else about her, and she was not a wordy woman. Her voice had a soothing effect and she knew how much to say and how much to leave unsaid.

Jim listened almost in silence.

When she first mentioned the motor car, he murmured: "I got out of my reckoning and took the wrong turning. The brakes went wrong. It was a brute of a thing. I hired it for the day."

"It did ye an ill turn," said Margaret.

"What 's become of it?" he asked, and she explained that the wreck of the car had been removed to an empty barn, and then went quietly on with her story.

When she had told him as much as she thought he was fit to hear, she sat on in silence and gave him time to think it over.

"What name did you say?" he asked, after a few minutes. "What 's the name of the man who 's taken me in and been so kind to me?"

"Brewster," he repeated after her several times, as though trying to recall some memory associated with the name.

"Dinna fash yersel aboot names," said Margaret soothingly. "Bide still a wee and try tae get anither bit sleep."

He was quiet for a short time and then became restless.

Margaret bent over him.

"Are ye in pain?" she asked.

"It 's not that," he answered. "I want to send a message to some one."

He looked down at his bandaged hand.

"A telegram would do. Will you write it for me?"

Margaret crossed to a table by the window and brought from it a telegraph-form book and a pencil. It was no use telling him to lie still and go to sleep. He would do neither so long as he had something on his mind.

"Yes, sir. An' what shall I say?" she asked, laying the book on her lap and holding the pencil ready.

Jim could not make up his mind what he

wanted to say, or rather his brain would not work clearly.

"Can't you help me?" he asked wearily. "I don't want the person to know where I am, or what's happened. Just that I could not keep an appointment."

Margaret wrote down three words in a round, distinct hand, and held them up for him to see.

"Could not come."

The strained expression of Jim's face relaxed, and a gleam of humour flickered over it for a moment.

"You know the value of words," he said.

"Telegrams is no like letters," answered Margaret. "They chaarge extra if ye pit in ower many words."

"You 're Scotch?" said Jim.

"Ay," said Margaret. "I 'm Scotch. Did ye ken by ma tongue? I 'm prood o' ma Scotch. I 've niver been outside o' Pittivie a' ma days. I've sairved the family here for fifty years."

She picked up the pencil again.

"What will be the name and the address, sir?"

"Mrs.—Maynard," said Jim, slowly. Then he tried to say more, but looked at her helplessly. "I can't remember," he murmured. "I know I had it somewhere—the address, but—my head 's no use."

He lay still, trying to think.

"She 's not in town, but it might be sent on," he kept whispering to himself; then, very laboriously, he spelt out a London address, which Margaret copied onto the telegraph form.

She did it very slowly, with a curious, puzzled look in her eyes. She had folded up the telegram, and was rising from her chair to put it into an envelope and give orders for it to be sent down to the village where there was a sub-office, when Jim stretched out his uninjured left hand and took it from her.

"I 'm afraid I 've troubled you for no use," he said. "It might not reach the person it is intended for. Do you mind tearing it up?"

He leaned back exhausted and his eyes

closed. He had already fallen into a half-sleep before she had done what he asked.

Margaret had something to think about that evening, which caused her a good deal of wonder.

“Maynard,” she said over to herself more than once. “I ken the name as weel as ma ain. Thon drunken buddy wha Davie had charge o’ was ca’d Maynard! A fearsome man! Davie’s life was no’ safe wi’ him. An’ he had a wife in Lunnon, and that address he gied me for the telegram was whaur she bided.”

David was Margaret’s brother. In force of character he resembled his sister, and it was a quality which he found very useful in his profession. In medical circles he was well known as a man who could be thoroughly trusted to undertake the charge of patients suffering from the most violent forms of drink mania.

CHAPTER VI

THE PATERNAL INSTINCT

AFTER that first return to consciousness, Jim Adair threw off the effects of his accident rapidly. He and his host took a mutual liking to each other; but the vague feeling that Sir Andrew's name was somehow familiar to him, persistently haunted Jim and annoyed him.

He alluded to the subject, but Sir Andrew managed to evade his questions. The latter had two reasons for doing so. Jim's head was not strong enough yet to stand any great mental strain, and he had promised Nanny to keep her presence at the castle a secret from her husband until she gave him liberty to speak.

The first morning that Jim was allowed to go into the garden, he asked if he might have his chair placed where he could look out on the

sea. The sight and smell of it, he said, were the best tonic he could have.

To the east of the castle, and within the shelter of the ruins, was a stretch of short green turf. It sloped very gradually down to the low wall which bordered the edge of the cliff, and below it, stretching away into the soft haze of distance on every side, was the sea.

It was a quiet spot, apart from the garden, but within sight of the house, and Jim's chair was comfortably arranged there, and he was left to himself, with a thoughtfulness which he much appreciated.

He was content to lie still and do nothing. The sea was a companion of which he could never tire. It was one of the great volumes of Nature which was full of meaning and mystery; and he lay and looked, to where the blue of sky and sea melted into one, and the sensation of limitless space soothed his tired brain, cramped for days within the bounds of one room. He watched the fleet of fishing boats tacking before the light breeze which ruffled the surface of the water, and now and again,

far out, he saw the smoke of a steamer on her way up to one of the busy ports at the head of the broad Firth.

A gull flapped its wings lazily above his head. He heard the hoarse chuckle of the puffins and guillemots as they squatted on the ledges of rock below; there was the faint smell of seaweed mingled with the scents of the flowers blown across to him from the borders in Lady Brewster's garden. He half shut his eyes, and allowed the peace of it all to steal over him undisturbed. He had almost drifted into the land of dreams when he heard the click of a gate opening, and looked across the stretch of grass to see from where the sound came.

Sandy MacNab, with his creel on his shoulders, had appeared from behind the ruined gable and was following a foot track beaten into the grass, which would lead him round to the back premises of the castle.

He very often took that way when delivering his load of fish. He could run his boat close under the Castle Rock unless the weather

was very rough, and there was a flight of steps and a winding path which led up to a gate leading into the ruins. He had permission to use that way when it suited his purpose.

He saw the figure lying in the chair, and was passing on as noiselessly as he could, for he thought Captain Adair was asleep and was very much afraid of disturbing him.

Jim was not asleep. He saw Sandy, and the sight of a man in a sou'wester and sea boots interested him. He called out, "Good-morning," and asked him what he had got in his creel.

Sandy touched the brim of his sou'wester and drew nearer. In a few minutes he found himself talking to the stranger as naturally as he would have done to Sir Andrew.

The conversation was about boats, and gear, and tides, and fishing banks, and a variety of seafaring matters, which Sandy discovered were as interesting to this tall, thin man, with the tired eyes and the pleasant voice, as they were to himself.

“And you’ve got a boat of your own for the small fishing?” asked Jim.

“Ay,” said Sandy. “The *Bonny Meg*. She’s a fine boat, sir.”

The naming of his boat was the nearest approach to a declaration of his feelings to Margaret which Sandy had ever ventured upon. He was not sure whether Margaret recognised the compliment paid her.

“Will you take me out in your boat?” asked Jim. “To-morrow, say?”

“Ay, surely,” answered Sandy readily. “I’ll dae that wi’ pleasure, sir.”

“Can I get down to her from here?” said Jim.

Sandy pushed back his sou’wester and scratched the top of his ear.

“The brae’s no that bad,” he said doubtfully. “But ye dinna look ower strong yet.”

“Oh, I can walk all right,” answered Jim. “You can give me an arm if it’s steep. What time will you come for me?”

The idea of being on the water pleased him.

He felt fresh vigour returning at the thought of it.

“About three o’clock?” queried Sandy.

“Wud that suit ye?”

“To-morrow at three o’clock, then. I’ll be ready. You ’ll find me here,” said Jim.

Sandy, looking up, saw Margaret coming out from the house, and she carried something in her arms wrapped in a white shawl. Jim could not see her very well, as she halted immediately behind his chair. She asked him a few questions, as though she had come out to see that he had everything he required, and while talking, she bent down and laid the white bundle she carried close beside his chair; so close that he could not see it from where he lay, and so quietly that her action passed unnoticed. Then she made a sign to Sandy to follow her, and led the way back into the house.

Jim lay still, thinking idly of Sandy and the proposed sail the following afternoon. Gradually he became aware of something moving beside him. It was n’t the active restlessness

of a dog or a puppy, and if it had been a cat it would have purred or scratched or done something essentially cat-like.

It was something feeble and yet persistent. The fringe of the rug which was thrown over his knees was being gently tugged, like a small fish nibbling at a bait.

He turned on his side and stretched over to see what it was. The chair was a low one, and he found himself looking full into the wondering eyes of a little child. Its baby hands were clinging to the rug. It was trying to raise its tiny body upwards, and its soft curls touched his hand as he held on to the edge of the chair.

For one moment he saw the little face distinctly. The solemn, wondering eyes, and every feature cut with the clearness of a cameo, then it vanished from his sight. He was staring at a round of black, against which spots of light kept appearing and disappearing with meaningless persistency.

He knew that he was repeating Nanny's name over and over again; that it dropped

from his lips without any visible effort, and that he could not help saying it. He recognised the name, but he could not recognise the voice which whispered it. Then the mist cleared, and he saw the face again. The wondering eyes were still looking into his. The black cloud had only lasted for a few seconds, but it had seemed like an eternity. He put out his uninjured hand timidly, fearing that if he touched the child it would vanish again. But its body was soft and warm, and his arm closed round it and he lifted it up until it nestled contentedly against the breast of his coat.

It made odd gurgling sounds, and its fingers fastened round the links of his watch chain. It knew all about watch chains and what lived at the end of them, for it pulled and pulled and pulled, until it pulled the watch out of his pocket, and held it to its mouth, and looked woefully disappointed because it would n't play the game properly, and open as it ought to do.

Jim had never held a baby in his arms like

that before, but if any one had tried to take it from him, he knew he would have a fierce desire to hit out at them, and tell them to leave him alone.

It had wonderfully caressing little ways and made games for itself out of nothing at all. Then, with the sudden abandonment which seizes a small child, it threw its head down on his shoulder and shut its eyes.

He felt its warm breathing against his neck, and the soft, downy hair brushed his cheek.

The upward curve of the dark lashes: the way the hair grew on the baby forehead: the red bow of the short upper lip. It was Nanny!—Nanny! He touched one of the tiny curls, and the sunlight turned it to threads of gold, and it seemed to cling to his finger.

Almost a sob broke from his lips. The little face brought back memory with so vivid a rush that he could hardly bear the pain of it. How often had Nanny's head lain there! How often he had twisted her hair round his finger! How often he had kissed her sleeping

eyelids, and listened to her soft breathing!

The child moved. It opened its eyes drowsily, and then shut them again with a fluttering sigh. He drew the little curl across his lips and kissed it.

CHAPTER VII

THE PICNIC AT COWRIE BAY

IN bringing about the meeting between the father and his unknown child, Margaret had acted upon impulse: a thing which she never remembered to have done before.

It was against her principles, and she reflected afterwards that perhaps it was a judgment upon her that the act involved her in immediate difficulties, and not to put too fine a point on it, the necessity of telling what she frankly owned to herself were a "heap o' lees." For when she came back to take the child away from him, Jim flatly refused to give it up, and asked questions about it so searchingly and to the point that she felt she must either tell him the truth or satisfy him with conclusive untruth, and she chose to do the latter. She told him the child belonged to a friend of hers, and that she had left it

in her charge that morning because she had to go away for the day. She soothed her conscience with the reflection that she would make a confession later, when the need for concealment was past.

She felt it her duty to tell Nanny what had happened, and Nanny took fright at once. She knew that she was only dallying with time. Now that Jim was able to go about again and inquire into the surroundings of the people he was living amongst, it would be impossible to keep from him the knowledge of her presence at Pittivie. She had wanted to go away; she had implored Sir Andrew to allow her to do so, but on that point he had been inexorable. He could not force her to go back to her husband; their future relations towards each other were a matter which they must decide for themselves, but before Jim left Pittivie, Nanny must consent to see him and make known to him the existence of the child.

“You ought not to have kept its birth a secret from him,” he had said with a severity

which she had never heard in his voice before. "He may find it very hard to forgive you. It's the kind of thing a man would feel most acutely, for you've placed yourself in a position before the world which he will resent quite as much as his own wounded feelings."

Nanny knew that what he said was true, and no one realised better than herself what a good friend her cousin had been to her. She argued the matter out to herself that night after Margaret had told her about having laid the child down by Jim's chair, and what had happened afterwards. She determined that on the next day she would put an end to this terrible suspense which was becoming almost unbearable.

Circumstances occurred the following morning to make her change her mind. Sir Andrew and Lady Brewster went out to lunch. It was an unusual thing for them to do, for they were very much stay-at-home people, and Pittivie was some distance from even its nearest neighbours. It meant, prob-

ably, that they would not be back till the evening.

Nanny seized on the chance of a reprieve; her courage fled. Without their protecting influence near, she could not face the meeting with Jim.

"I'm going to spend the whole day out of doors," she announced to Margaret after breakfast. "I'll ask Sandy to take baby and me in his boat to Cowrie Bay, and leave us there. You must pack a basket for us with all the food that we'll want, and he can come and fetch us after tea."

Margaret had at first demurred, but after a minute's consideration she had given way and quite entered into the spirit of the expedition, and had herself seen the little party off from the landing-stage below the castle cliff.

As Sandy was unfastening the rope which held the *Bonny Meg* alongside the stone steps, she turned her back on the boat, and said to him in her low, quiet voice:

"Ye're tae tak the gentleman for a sail in the aifternin, are ye no?"

“Ay,” said Sandy, busy with the rope, and not looking up.

“Afore ye gang wi’ him, I’ve a wurd tae say tae ye. Come roond tae my window and chap on the sill,” she said in the same quiet voice of authority.

A dull glow rose to Sandy’s sunburnt cheeks. He did not look up, but it was because he was too much astonished to lift his eyes to Margaret’s face. She had never made an appointment with him before. The suggestion of familiarity it conjured up took his breath away. To be asked to come and tap on her window sill, as though there was some clandestine secret between them? It was almost incredible.

“Ay, Marget, I’ll dae yere biddin’,” he stammered inarticulately, and stepping over the side of his boat he began to fumble about for an oar to shove her off from the rock.

Margaret’s own special sitting-room at Pittivie was in a part of the castle which faced eastwards, and looked out over the ruins. On one side, its small, narrow windows were

completely hidden by the ivy which grew rampantly over the outside walls, and Lady Brewster never could understand her liking for a room which was gloomy in many ways.

It was part of one of the old towers which had crumbled into decay, all except the basement storey, and it had a gruesome history connected with it. The walls were of massive thickness; and if any one had been permitted to roll back the carpet from the flagged floor of Margaret's room, they would have found in the centre a stout iron ring sunk into one of the square slabs of stone.

The stone could be raised with difficulty, and revealed a yawning black hole, the depths of which no man had ever been able to fathom.

In ancient records relating to the history of the castle, mention was frequently made of the Death Tower. In the days of feudalism the lords of Pittvie had been little kings in the land, and had administered justice according to their own interpretation of the word. A powerful enemy, an unruly subject, a faithless wife, or a false lover—what more easy way to

get rid of them than to lure them to their own destruction within the castle walls? A thrust of the sword, a brief struggle, a strangled cry on the brink of the fathomless grave, and the Death Tower kept its own secrets.

As the eight-day clock in the hall chimed the quarter to three, Sandy tapped with the handle of his heavy clasp knife on the sill of Margaret's window. It was not one of the windows hidden by the ivy; it looked out over the sea and the sun streamed into it during the morning hours.

Sandy was a short man, and the window was high, and the walls of the tower very thick. He could not see Margaret's figure very distinctly, but her voice answered his sign at once.

"Is that you, Sandy MacNab?"

"Ay, Marget, it's me. Ye were speirin' aifter havin' a wurd wi' me. What is 't?"

There was a note of eager expectation in his question.

"Ye're takin' the Captain oot in yir boat? Weel, I'm wantin' ye tae gang roond by yir

lobster pots, an' fetch me, maybe twa lobsters—an some partins, forbye."

Sandy felt as though a bucket of cold water had been thrown over him. She had only asked him to come to the window to give an order about crabs and lobsters.

"But Marget," he protested, "her leddyship does na hud wi' partins and sic like. They're no gude for the deegestion. I've heerd her say that mysel."

"I'm wantin' them," said Margaret, calmly.

"An' the Captain," pleaded Sandy. "It's a bit sail he's wantin', no just daunderin' about the shore."

An idea struck him suddenly.

"An', Marget," he continued eagerly, "the tide's no richt for ma lobster pots. It'll be ower low. There are a whin places I canna git the *Bonny Meg* through. I wud hae tae git oot myself maybe, and wi' anither weicht in the boat I cud na float her ower the rocks."

Sandy was making exactly the objection Margaret wished him to make.

"See now, Sandy MacNab, I mun hae

what I want," she said firmly. "Ye 'll tak the Captain for a bit sail—maybe for an hoor. Then ye 'll tell him ye canna tak him roond the pint tae yir lobster pots for fear o' the rocks, an' ye 'll land him at Cowrie Bay, an' ca' for him on yir way back. D'ye unnerstan'? An' ye needna' let on aboot the leddy an' the bairn. Ye needna' tell him that they're at Cowrie Bay."

"Ay, Marget, but——"

"It's chappit three. The Captain 'll be waitin' on ye," came the quiet voice from the other side of the window. It was softly closed, and Sandy knew it was no use trying to say anything further.

CHAPTER VIII

IS THAT CHILD MINE?

JIM was waiting for Sandy; he had not forgotten his appointment, but would have been more interested in keeping it if his mind had not been so much occupied in thinking of something else.

The incident of the day before had made a profound impression upon him. The child that he had held in his arms, and whose face bore such a startling resemblance to that other face which was seldom out of his thoughts for long, haunted him persistently. It had roused him from the apathy into which his brain had fallen since his accident. It filled him with a desire to be up and doing again. The recollection of what he had set out to do when he started on his journey north, the details of his plans and motives, came back to him distinct and tangible. Another day of waiting until

the return of his host and hostess, and then he would start again on his quest.

Sandy was surprised to find the difference that one day had made in Captain Adair's strength and appearance. He required very little help in getting down to the boat, and stepped into it and took his seat at the tiller almost mechanically.

"All right," he said, in answer to a question. "I've got one arm, anyhow. If you manage the sail, I'll steer her."

His practised eye took the measure of the *Bonny Meg*, from the brown patch on the sail which Sandy was hauling up the mast, to the baling tin under the seat. He turned his head this way and that to catch the exact quarter from which the wind blew. It was just enough to fill the sail, and as the boat got under way, he leant back against the seat with a sigh of contentment.

He could not have asked for a better way of spending the afternoon.

When Sandy saw him take the tiller, he was a little anxious. How was he to control the

movements of the *Bonny Meg* if he was not allowed to steer her? But he soon realised it was a matter of indifference to Jim where he went. He was quite pleased to follow Sandy's directions. They had been out for more than an hour when Sandy began to explain about Margaret and the lobster pots. The little man's quaint terms of speech amused Jim, but he found it difficult to follow Sandy's involved reasonings.

"I see," he said at last. "You want to leave me on this side of the point, and then come back to fetch me? Is that it?"

"Weel, ye ken, sir," said Sandy. "It's no me—it's Marget. If she wants lobsters, she mun hae lobsters, and the partins, forbye."

Jim smiled.

"Do you always do what Margaret wants you to do?"

"Ay," said Sandy. "I'm under petticoat government, ye ken. There's na hairder government nor petticoat government, Captain," he added solemnly.

Jim laughed outright.

"We'd better hurry then," he said. "Where is this Cowrie Bay you speak of, where I'm to be landed? Can we run in on this tack?"

"Ay," said Sandy, relieved to find the way was made so easy for him. "Keep her heid on thon big black rock. She'll rin in easy. It's a' sand in Cowrie Bay."

It would have interested Jim to have helped Sandy with his lobster pots, but as he was evidently not wanted, he allowed himself to be put ashore without any remonstrance.

"Don't forget to come back for me," he called out as he stood on the wet beach, and watched Sandy thrust his oar into the sand and shove the *Bonny Meg* into deep water.

"I'll no forget, and I'll no be lang," cried out the little man. He was very pleased with himself at the way he had carried out his instructions.

Left to himself, Jim sat down on a patch of dry shingle, and basked in the sunshine for some time. Then he rose, and leaning on his stick, for the ground was heavy and his legs did not feel very strong under him, walked

slowly along the curve of the bay. There were some rocks on ahead, and he hoped to find a comfortable corner where he could get a lean for his back and perhaps have time to smoke a pipe before Sandy's return. He put his hand in his pocket to make sure that his pipe and tobacco were there; he could manage to light his pipe with one hand by holding the match-box between his knees.

The touch of his tobacco pouch made him think somehow of his lost pocket-book. He had not liked to make too much of its loss, because the Brewsters had been so extremely kind to him, and it might look like a reflection on the care they had taken of his property. He concluded it had been destroyed in the smash of the motor-car.

He now remembered quite well that the address he had wanted on the day when he had recovered consciousness was among the letters in the pocket-book. His future plans hung very critically on those letters. He would have given a good deal to have recovered possession of them, and as he walked along with his eyes

on the ground, he was trying hard to remember word for word what they contained, and the address from which they had been written.

He was so busy thinking that he had come abreast of the ridge of rocks before he was aware of it. He looked up to find himself standing at the entrance to a little cove.

It lay like a cup in the shelter of the rock. The sandy floor was very white, and strewn with small pink shells; an ideal place for a picnic or for spending a lazy afternoon, and some one had evidently found it so; for Jim drew back with an apology on his lips when he found himself stumbling over a tea basket and a bundle of rugs.

A second glance told him that although the evidences of occupation were there, the place was deserted. He was turning away and about to retrace his steps when he heard a sound which struck on his ear with a shock of familiarity. The sound came from a red cushion fitted in between two flat stones upon which lay something wrapped in a white shawl.

A little arm was raised in the air and waved backwards and forwards.

His feet refused to take him away from that red cushion, but they did not refuse to carry him towards it. In another second he was bending over the white shawl. The little face, which had haunted him waking and sleeping ever since it had lain pressed against his shoulder, looked up at him. Nanny's eyes!—Nanny's mouth! with the sharp curve in the upper lip—a fluff of little curls tipped with gold, where the ends caught the sunlight!

“Good God!” he groaned under his breath. “Am I going out of my mind?”

A few paces away, at the back of the rock, a spring bubbled out from the green bank which overhung the shore, and Nanny, unconscious of what was happening, was kneeling by the side of it, washing out the teapot and the other things she had used, before putting them again in the basket.

She had not been away from the child for more than a few minutes, but she hurried back, thinking she heard a sound.

Jim was half kneeling with his back to her, and for the moment she did not recognise him. What she saw was a man's figure bending over the child, and terror seized hold of her. She caught him by his coat and tried to drag him back.

Jim swung round quickly, and she saw the flash of recognition spring into his eyes. She shrank away from him, and sank down on the sand by the child's cushion.

The surprise of the meeting to her was nothing in comparison to what it was to Jim. For days the thought of it had been hanging over her head, and she had anticipated discovery at every turn. She was prepared; he was not.

She heard him repeat her name several times in a dull voice. Every vestige of colour died out of his face, and she saw beads of moisture gather on his forehead. Her head drooped. She dared not look at him, but the silence became so terrible that at last she had to raise her eyes.

He was still kneeling, with his hand leaning

on the handle of his stick, and staring down at the child. Then his eyes went from its face to hers, and then back again. The child lay contentedly on its cushion, until its attention was attracted by his watch chain.

With a quickness of decision, which it certainly inherited from its mother, it rolled nimbly over on its side, and digging its little hands into the folds of the shawl, straightened its back and sat bolt upright.

It made a picture that an artist would have envied. The small, well-poised figure, silhouetted against the blue-black of the rock: the sunlight shining like a halo round the little golden head: the flower-like face, with the starry eyes alight with a new expectancy, as it held out its arms to the man in front of it.

Nanny saw the blood rush back to Jim's face. He turned to her sharply, and caught hold of her wrist. There was no bewilderment now in his expression. His eyes were burning with a kind of fierce hunger, which made her heart ache in pity for the child-love which she had denied him.

His fingers tightened on her soft skin with a grip that hurt. She felt the tremor of his touch run through her veins and set every pulse throbbing.

"Is that child mine?" he demanded. "Tell me quickly. I can't bear it a moment longer."

Nanny's nerves were strung up to such a pitch of tension that an answer would have been forced from her whether she willed it or not.

"Can't you see that it is my baby?" she cried. "It's me! Every bit of her is me."

He kept his hand on her wrist, and grasped it still tighter. She could almost have screamed with the pain of it.

"Say what I ask you," he repeated. "It's my child?"

"Jim, what do you mean?" and she turned on him with blazing eyes.

Then it flashed upon him how his question must sound to her. A doubt of Nanny had never crossed his mind, but the overwhelming knowledge of his own fatherhood had come

upon him with such suddenness that he could only dimly grasp the immensity of its mystery.

He let go his hold of her.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered "I did not mean—I mean I was afraid to think it was true. I did n't know what I was saying," he added humbly.

He passed his hand across his forehead, and she realised with a quick throb of pain how thin and ill he looked.

"I've had a bad smash. It knocked me silly for a bit," he murmured.

He had dropped his stick when he caught hold of her wrist. He changed his position, and sat down on the sand, keeping his eyes still shaded.

She knew he was trying to make out the meaning of it all to himself, and presently he would ask her questions. He would not storm or rail at her: that was not his way; but his reproach would be worse to bear than anger, and he had a right to reproach her bitterly.

The wrong he had done her for the moment

dwindled into insignificance, for she knew that she had done him quite as great a wrong in concealing from him the birth of his child.

She began to grow restless. When would he look up? she wondered. What were his thoughts? What was he looking at? For from the way he had turned his head she could not see his expression.

The child again held out its arms. It saw the thing which it had played with the day before, just out of reach, and it wanted to play with it once more. It threw itself forward on its hands and wriggled off the cushion. It looked a fragile little creature, but it was quick in its movements. In another half minute it was on his knee and had pulled the watch out of his pocket, and was kissing it and blowing on it with baby delight.

It gave Nanny the oddest sensation she had ever experienced in her life to see the child in its father's arms, and Jim did not seem embarrassed by it. He moved, so that it could lean against him more comfortably, and held

it as if he were accustomed to the touch of its little soft body.

Something very like a sob rose in her throat.

“He has n’t got a thought or look to spare for me. He can’t take his eyes off her. He ’s forgotten all about me.”

She did him an injustice, but Jim’s mind was for the time being so completely off its balance that he hardly knew what he was doing.

Nanny felt very forlorn and dejected, and left out in the cold. For days she had been working herself up to meet this ordeal. She had gone over in her mind again and again what he would say, and how she would answer his reproaches, and now, nothing seemed to be required of her.

The baby suddenly threw the watch away, and it slipped and rolled to within an inch of the hem of Nanny’s dress. She stooped to pick it up, and held it out as far as she dared. Jim’s hand closed over hers, and he tried to draw her nearer to him, but she resisted.

"What do you want?" she faltered.

"Come closer," he said. "I can't move, and I want to see your face properly."

She obeyed him. She was so close to him now that she could see all the lines about his eyes and mouth; lines that never used to be there before; and there was a little grey in his hair just where it ran back behind his ears.

He tried to speak more than once, but she could not tell what question struggled for utterance. It was one he found very difficult, or else he did not know how to clothe it in words.

At last the pent-up bitterness of all the past dreary loneliness broke from him harshly and abruptly.

"How could you do it, Nanny? How could you leave me and take this from me?"

A tide of crimson swept over her from neck to brow. She bowed her head for an instant over her hands, then held them out to him beseechingly.

"Jim, I did not know. I would not have left you if I had known."

Her eyes met his fearlessly.

He did not speak, but she knew that he believed her.

In the distance sounded a call, which was repeated more than once. They looked up to see that the *Bonny Meg* had been run ashore at no great distance from the cove, and that it was Sandy who was calling to them.

CHAPTER IX

NANNY FACES HER HUSBAND

“NOT coming back to-night. Brewster.”
Nanny read the telegram aloud with a look of dismay on her face. She was standing in the middle of the nursery, and Margaret was sitting in the low rocking-chair, undressing the baby preparatory to putting it to bed.

The telegram was addressed to Margaret, and had arrived earlier in the afternoon, but Nanny had only come back a few minutes before. She read it over a second time.

“I am not going downstairs again this evening,” she said decidedly. “I don’t want any dinner.”

She had made exactly the same remark on a previous occasion not so very long ago, and it had been met with the same quiet answer.

“Ye mun hae yir dinner, mem. An’ there ’s

the Captain? Sir Andry would na like him tae be negleckit. He canna cut up his meat for himsel'. The maister aye does it."

Nanny crumpled up the telegram into a ball and threw it into the fire. Her room and the nursery adjoined one another, and the doors between them were always open. She passed through into her own room, and sat down in front of the dressing-table.

How her head ached! She drew the pins out of her hat, and threw it down on a chair. It was heavy and uncomfortable, and had left a mark across her forehead.

She stared at her own reflection and thought how dull and uninteresting she looked.

She wondered what Jim had thought of her; if he had noticed any change in her? All the way back in the boat she had been conscious that he was watching her in an intent way, as though he were trying to accustom himself to an entirely new order of things.

She ran her fingers restlessly through her hair. The wind had blown it into little tight rings about her ears and at the nape of her neck.

She had better go down to dinner after all, she thought to herself. What was the use of putting off? Jim would never be satisfied with those few broken questions and answers which Sandy's return had interrupted. The shock of the meeting was over, but all that lay beyond must be faced.

She rose, and going over to the wardrobe opened the doors and ran her eyes carelessly over its contents. For the last year she had not taken much interest in her clothes, and she had been in mourning most of the time. The mourning for her father had been very simple, and she could count on the fingers of one hand all the frocks she possessed.

There was a dress of some soft white stuff which was pretty and fresh. It was not an evening dress, but she sometimes wore it, because they often sat out after dinner if it was warm. Side by side with it hung an unbecoming garment which the local dress-maker had made, and which she called a tea-gown. It was long and black and limp—utterly shapeless, and high to the neck. The

only redeeming feature about it was that it had open hanging sleeves, and Nanny's arms were beautiful. They were very white and softly rounded like a child's, and her hands did not look useless, although they were so pretty.

Not giving herself time to hesitate between the choice of the two dresses, she stretched up and unhooked the ugly black one from its peg.

Jim was standing on the hearth rug by the fireplace when she entered the hall. She knew he was there, for she had seen him through one of the slits in the wall as she came downstairs. A chill air had come up with the evening breeze, and there was a cheerful wood fire burning in the old-fashioned grate. As she moved slowly across to where he stood, he remarked that the fire felt very comfortable and asked if she were cold.

"No, thank you; I am not cold," she answered, and told him of the telegram, and that Sir Andrew and Lady Brewster would

not be home that night; a fact which he knew already, but did not think it necessary to explain.

She led the way into the dining-room, which opened from the hall, and Jim followed the swish of her black train as it swept over the polished boards.

“He hates to see a woman badly dressed—and I know the back hangs abominably,” she said to herself, and held her head a little higher than usual and walked with much dignity.

Jim noticed the dress, but only to wonder if it was its gloomy colour which made her look so white and tired. Her youth and vitality seemed to have deserted her.

What a fool he had been to take her at her word and stay away so long, he kept saying to himself.

The dining-room was a small room, panelled in dark wood and with a very low ceiling. It was similar to many rooms of that particular date in old Scotch houses like Pittivie, and when the doors were shut, they disappeared

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into the lines of the panelling, and had no resemblance to doors. The table was round, and the shaded lamp on it was the only spot of colour which stood out from the dusk of the general background. The two places had been laid so that neither the lamp nor the flowers should interfere with the uninterrupted view each person could have of the other.

Nanny felt as if she were shut up in a tight box and could not breath properly. It was a relief every time the servant came in and out of the room with the different courses. Jim made conversation which was so palpably forced that she could not find anything to say to help him out with it, except meaningless platitudes.

He politely accepted her offer to cut up his food for him, and as she bent over the plate she felt supremely grateful to fish for growing so many bones in their bodies. It necessitated her concentrating her entire attention on what she was doing for the time being.

When she rose to leave the room, he tried to find the door to open it for her to pass out,

but each panel looked exactly the same as the other, and she was obliged to show him the catch and how it worked.

"All the doors here open like that," she remarked, glad to speak on some subject which was absolutely commonplace. "A friend of Andrew's, staying in the house, was once shut up in a room for hours. He did n't know how to get out."

She looked up at him for a second.

"You would like to have your coffee and cigarette here?"

"No," he answered. "I'm coming with you."

They passed on to the end of the hall beside the fireplace. That corner always looked cheerful and homelike. A high leather screen drawn partly across it gave it an air of privacy. There were comfortable chairs. A table was drawn up to the light, on which were books and the daily papers, and there were quantities of flowers everywhere.

Nanny sat down in a low seat and picked up a fire-screen, which she did not require,

but she felt in some way it was a kind of protection.

"You may smoke here if you like," she said.

"Thank you," said Jim. "But I don't want to smoke just now—I want to talk."

Nanny moved uneasily. She wished he had accepted her suggestion. She wanted him to do something which would take off his attention, however slightly, from herself.

He drew in his chair near enough to be able to talk quietly without raising his voice. He had rather a low voice at any time, and it had a very pleasant tone in it. Charm of voice is one of the best, and perhaps rarest gifts a man can have. His left hand hung over the arm of his chair and almost touched the side of hers.

She wondered how he would begin? It was so difficult always to say the first few words. She felt very sore about many things, but then he must feel sore too? If only he would explain and break down the terrible wall of reserve against which she had beaten her wings so helplessly in the past? If he would only do that, she had some hopes. Even the fact of

that woman's letters being in his pocket-book might not have so much significance as she had imagined. But would he still expect her to trust him blindly? Would he still keep up that dreadful silence which was more paralyzing than any anger or reproach?

She stared at the painted picture of the impossible bird on the fire-screen, and was so engrossed in thinking of what he was likely to say, and how he would say it, that she started and flushed crimson to find that his hand was lying on one of the folds of her dress and that he was looking at her.

"Thank you for—giving me the child, Nanny," he said.

It was the last thing she had expected him to say, and the words were uttered simply, and without demonstration of any kind. But she knew every inflection of his voice—every shade of feeling which it could imply, and just how much it cost him to keep it steady whilst he spoke these few words.

The screen dropped from her fingers and slipped down on the rug. When he picked

it up and gave it back to her, he saw that she was trembling so that she could not hold it.

He stretched over, and taking a cushion from another chair, put it in at the back of hers.

“Don’t worry to talk,” he said. “I wanted to say that first. It means such a lot to us both, does n’t it?” Then he added, more lightly:

“The little blessing ’s the image of you, Nanny. What have you called her?”

Nanny found her voice with difficulty.

“They called her after me, Nancy—my real name, you know. She had to be christened in a great hurry because they did n’t think she was going to live. I hope you don’t mind. I did n’t know anything about it,” she concluded hastily.

Jim’s chair grated back sharply on the polished floor. She did not know what he intended to do, but the servant coming in with the coffee caused an interruption.

Nanny was the first to speak when they were left alone again.

"You forgive me for not having written and told you?" she asked nervously.

"It was my fault—not yours," he answered. "I ought never to have let you go. God knows I've been miserable enough this last year. But that letter you wrote, when I wanted to patch up things! It gave me the idea you did n't want me."

The thought of that letter made her cheeks tingle.

"At last I had to come back," continued Jim. "I could n't stand it any longer. I landed at Southampton—about a week before I came north, and I went up to town. I thought there might be a letter waiting for me somewhere, but there was n't; and you had n't drawn any money."

He was suddenly conscious of the ugly black frock; and she was thinner than she used to be.

"You have n't wanted for anything?" he asked sharply. "They've been good to you here?"

"Good!" she echoed. "I think you've

had an example of their goodness. But"—and she laughed a little nervously—"I've been rather lazy about some things."

She changed the conversation hurriedly.

"You were in London. You heard then about father?"

"Only by chance the day before I left," said Jim. "London's a deserted city just now, and I've been knocking about in such outlandish places that I didn't get my letters or papers regularly. I lost no time when I did hear. I thought I wouldn't let you know. I would just come. I was on my way to find you when the smash happened."

The pocket-book and those condemning letters flashed back to Nanny's memory. She did not know what little devil prompted her to blurt out her question so abruptly:

"But you were going to see Mrs. Maynard first?"

CHAPTER X

WHAT JIM SAID TO HIS WIFE

IT was a guess at the truth, but it hit the mark.

Jim pulled himself together, and the look of drawing back into himself which she dreaded came over his face.

"I was going to see her. If you had waited another two seconds I would have told you so. But, how did you know?"

Nanny held herself very upright, and drew as far away from him as possible.

"Her letters were in your pocket-book. I did not read them—I guessed. Andrew gave me the book before he knew who you were."

"I should like to have that book back again," said Jim quietly.

"I burnt it," said Nanny. "Everything.

I burnt it there." She pointed to the grate. She was very frightened, but she would not show that she was.

Jim said nothing. He looked at the place which had swallowed up his property wholesale. He could imagine the scene exactly as it happened. Nanny in her impetuous way bundling everything into a heap and throwing it into the flames. If he had been in the mood for being amused he might have laughed, but he was n't.

He rose slowly from his seat and stood with his back to the fire, towering above her.

"Nanny! look at me," he said sternly.

He was tall; she had to throw her head back against the cushion to see him, and she pressed her lips tightly together to keep them from quivering.

"Give me your hand," he said.

She hesitated for a moment, and then put her hand into his.

"I swear to you on my honour—as your husband—any oath you like to put me on, that I have never wronged you in thought or

deed. No woman comes before you, and never will. Do you believe me?"

She let her hand lie in his and she watched his eyes all the time.

"I want to believe you," she answered slowly.

Then with one of her impulsive gestures, she sprang to her feet.

"Every bit of me is crying out that I want to believe you. I do believe you! But you must promise me something. Say that you will? Say that you will promise me what I want before I ask?"

With the love-light shining in her eyes and all the wild charm of her beauty back again she stood before him, half pleading half demanding, for his answer.

"For God's sake ask me something I can say 'yes' to, or don't look at me like that," he said.

"Promise!" she cried, and she came a little nearer to him.

"If I can," he answered unevenly.

"If?" She threw up her head and was

about to break into passionate protest. Then her voice sank to a whisper.

"Jim, you will promise when you know it means everything to me. You love me a little bit still? Don't you?"

"Love you?" He put his hand on her shoulder, and then pushed her from him.

"If I loved you before, don't I love you a thousand times more, when you're the mother of my child! Go on, tell me," he said, almost roughly. "What is it you want me to promise?"

"That you will never see that woman again? That you will never have any communication with her whatever? That she will go out of your life now—from this very minute?"

She spoke deliberately, and moving back a step, watched him.

She saw that he was struggling hard to conquer some strong emotion. He dared not trust himself to look at her. If he had, he would have lost his head, and she would have been in his arms, and once he had felt

the touch of her lips on his, he would have given her his soul if she had asked for it.

"Promise, Jim," and her voice trembled in his ears like a far-away sigh.

"I—can't," he answered with his eyes on the ground. "Not yet."

He had expected one of Nanny's stormy outbursts, but she simply turned away from him, and he thought she was going to leave him without a word.

He followed her and barred the way.

"I won't have you leave me with that look on your face," he exclaimed vehemently. "Listen to what I have to say. Years ago, before you came into my life, I gave a promise. I bound myself to fulfil what I thought at the time was a duty, a work of reparation, and I promised to keep silence about it. Until I'm released from that promise, I can't do what you ask. You know to whom the promise was given. It was true what you said just now. I was going to her to ask her to give me my release. I can't see why she should n't. You are a generous woman. If I were able

to tell you the whole story, you'd be the first to hold out a helping hand to the one that's down. Will you wait? Will you let me go to her and ask her to set me free?"

"She will never set you free—Never!" answered Nanny drearily. "If she sets you free from that promise she loses you, and she loses all the things you can give her. Oh, can't you see?" she broke out passionately. "But you are blind! blind! blind! She wants to keep us apart. You own yourself that you cannot see why I should not be told. I would be generous. I would forgive you everything—anything, if you would only trust me. But I will not go back to you if she is still to come between us. It would be the same wretched story over again, and I could not bear it. You don't know her as I do; she would take you away from me again. This miserable promise! I do not believe it is worth that!" and she snapped her fingers contemptuously. "It is only to have a hold over you. That is why she values it."

She stopped breathless, and stood with

drooping head before him. When he tried to speak she held up her hand.

"I am thinking," she said. "Wait."

She moved about, touched some things on the table, altering the position of an ornament mechanically, then she came back and, clasping her hands behind her, looked at him steadily.

"I have changed my mind," she said. "Go to her. Tell her how it is between us, and that your promise is ruining your life. Your life, remember—because she says that she is your friend, and friends do not hurt each other intentionally. If she is honest, she will go right out of your life for ever, and that is all I ask. I do not want explanations. I will trust you. If she lets you go, then—you may come back to me."

This time she eluded him and was across the hall and her foot on the stairs before he could stop her.

She paused by the first of the narrow slits in the wall and glanced through. He was listening, with his head a little raised. When

she reached the second slit she hesitated and came to a standstill. He could not possibly see her, for she was high up and the walls were so thick. She leant her arms on the stone ledge which projected inwards, and looked down.

He was now moving about. He opened the front door and stood there for some minutes. She could feel the cool night air wafted up to her and hear the sound of the sea breaking against the cliff.

Presently he came back and held his injured hand under the light of the lamp. It was evidently paining him from the way he moved it, and Nanny remembered with a pang that it had to be dressed every night and that Sir Andrew did it for him. How would he dress it by himself? Rather anxiously she watched him lift the lamp in his left hand and carry it with him down the hall in the direction of his own room.

She waited, straining her ears to catch the slightest sound. For a minute there was silence; then came a succession of crashes,

one after the other, and in a flash she was down the stairs again.

He had not upset the lamp, for the light was streaming through the open doorway of his room, and as she stood on the threshold she saw what had happened. He had knocked over a basin and on to the top of that a large water jug, and a pool of water was spreading round the heap of broken china.

He was standing with his back to her. He had thrown all the towels down on the floor and was stamping them into the carpet to soak up the wet.

"What a devil of a mess!" she heard him saying to himself.

"Jim!" she exclaimed, and the face he turned towards her was so expressive of disgust and helplessness that she laughed.

She caught up the shovel from the fireplace and pitched the broken fragments pell mell into the bath which stood near. She swished the towels backwards and forwards over the wet carpet, and, rolling them up in a heap,

threw them on to the wooden boards under the washhand stand.

“There!” she exclaimed, her cheeks flushed with the exertion. “It has n’t done much harm.”

Jim did not attempt to interfere. It would have been useless to try, for Nanny’s movements were so quick, and there was something very refreshing in feeling the touch of her old impetuosity so near him.

“I let the thing slip,” he explained. He held up his bandaged hand. “I wanted to put on some fresh lotion.”

“I ’ll do it for you,” said Nanny, quickly. “Where are the things?”

He brought her a roll of lint and the lotion.

“I want a pair of scissors,” she said, and moved over to the dressing-table to fetch them. All his things were lying there—the brushes, and the bottles, with the familiar monograms staring her in the face. She caught up the scissors quickly and returned to him.

She had firm little hands. They did not

hesitate or bungle over their work. When the last strip of lint was unrolled and she saw the crushed fingers for the first time, she did not say anything, but he saw her teeth tighten quickly on her under lip and the eyelashes which turned upwards so exactly in the same way as the baby's did, quivered.

"Do you think it's really better than it was?" she asked.

"Oh, yes, heaps better," he answered cheerfully. "It will be all right in a day or two."

She began to put on the fresh dressing; and it was Nanny's way to be completely engrossed in what she was doing at the moment. She was so busy folding and twisting the bandage that she was only half conscious of her nearness to Jim. But if she was unconscious, he was not. Every touch of her fingers thrilled him. Every time she moved, her hair brushed against his shoulder, and when she bent her head he could see the little pulse beating in the curve of her white neck.

He was wondering how long he could stand it when she glanced up.

"Is that right? or have I tied the handkerchief over it too tight?" she asked.

He was afraid to keep her there, but he could n't bear to let her go.

"It is rather tight," he said. "It 's apt to stop the circulation."

She busied herself again with the handkerchief, slackening the pressure where it was fastened round the wrist.

"There!" she said at last. "I don't think I can make it any better."

"One thing more," he said, "before you run away. This sling that 's fastened under my coat. I slip my fingers into it when they ache with hanging down. Where 's the knot got to? It 's hitched round my shoulder somehow."

"Oh, I see what you mean," she answered readily.

He was burning his boats with a vengeance to ask her to do such a thing. She must put her arms almost round his neck to reach the knot, and it had been very tightly tied.

The wide sleeves fell back from her arms, and they looked very soft and white against

her black gown. What did she think he was made of? he wondered. He was flesh and blood, not a lump of wood.

"Nanny," he whispered, bending his head.

She was holding the scissors in her hand, trying to loosen the knot with them. At the tone of his voice her startled eyes were raised to his, but her power of action was for the moment paralysed.

She knew quite well what he was going to do. He caught her to him and kissed her. The touch of his lips burnt like fire, and brought back her senses with a rush.

Down went the scissors with a clatter and she wrenched herself free, and for the second time that evening fled up the winding stone stairs. She stood outside her own door pressing her hands against her hot cheeks.

"I'm not running away from him," she panted breathlessly. "I'm running away from myself. If he does that again I will never be able to hold out. I'll go back to him on any terms. I'm a fool about him, in spite of everything."

CHAPTER XI

NANNY CONFRONTS HER ENEMY

THE next morning there was a note from Lady Brewster to Nanny. She explained that their host and hostess, who were old friends of Sir Andrew's, had insisted upon making them stop the night, but that they were coming back that afternoon.

"We are bringing a party with us," she went on to say. "There are some English people staying in the house, and they want to see Pittivie and the ruins, and especially that dreadful hole in Margaret's room. Tell her to have the stone taken up, and to have a very nice tea, because her stories about the Death Tower are sure to give them the horrors; and like a dear, make the flowers pretty."

Lulu hated writing letters, and had scrib-

bled off her note in a great hurry. She did not say when the party were to arrive, or mention any names.

Nanny was very busy all that morning. Much more busy than there was any necessity for. It could not take her more than two hours at the utmost to arrange the flowers, and there was nothing else required of her; her chief object was to avoid a meeting with her husband.

Jim had had a very bad night, and his head ached intolerably the next morning. He did not appear until late, and when he did, he asked if he might have a chair brought out, and put in the same place where he had lain on the first morning of his convalescence.

When the gong sounded for lunch, and Margaret saw that her patient was lying very quiet and paying no attention to it she stepped softly up to him over the grass, and found that he was fast asleep.

“Dear, dear, he looks sad like,” she murmured. “He’s no’ sae weel the day”; and she gave orders that his lunch was to be kept

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hot, and served to him when he asked for it.

Nanny had been in and out of the garden all the morning, gathering flowers and arranging them in the hall, and the quaint old-fashioned rooms which opened from it; but she had carefully avoided that particular corner in the shelter of the ruins.

She had sent the baby down to the beach with one of the servants, who acted as nursery maid when required, so she was free to come and go as she pleased.

It was a great relief to her to find that she was to lunch alone. She hurried through the meal with a nervous dread hanging over her that Jim might appear at any moment; and when she had finished, she picked up a book from the hall table and went upstairs to the nursery.

The child was asleep in its cot. She sent away the girl who was watching beside it, and drawing a chair up to the window, sat down with the book open upon her lap.

She could not make up her mind what she

was going to do that afternoon: whether she would meet Andrew and Lulu on their return, and take her part as one of the family, or whether she would keep out of the way altogether until the visitors had gone. Lulu would understand; there would be no need to give any explanation as to her absence; but still, Lulu did not know that she and Jim had met? She would still be under the impression that Nanny wished her presence at Pittivie to be kept secret.

She sat still for some time, and did not attempt to read. Hardly a breath of air came in through the open window. It was warm and close: one of those intensely still days which often fall in early September, when the warning note of nature whispers that summer is merging into autumn.

The baby stirred and awoke. Like its mother, its sense of vitality was very strong. It was alert and wide awake in a moment, and beating with its little hands on the coverlet to attract attention.

Nanny took it up and set it on her lap.

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“He called you a little blessing, and thought you were the image of me,” she said, looking at the baby critically.

The child’s cheeks were still flushed with sleep, which made its eyes shine like stars; and the curls stood out round its head in a tumbled fluff of golden brown.

Nanny could not have told what influenced her to do what she did then. She so often acted on impulse, but there was nothing impulsive in the way she set about dressing her baby. On the contrary, her actions were unusually deliberate, and she took the greatest care over every detail; from the white kid shoes to the discarding of the coral necklace, which it generally wore round its neck.

“You are to be a white baby, to-day,” she said, smoothing the delicate embroidery on the little gown, which had been a present from Lady Brewster a few days before. It left the child’s neck and arms bare, but came almost down to the toes of the white kid shoes.

“It’s only pretty babies that can afford to be white babies,” she said, as she set it

on the floor and gave it something to play with, whilst she went to fetch her hat from the next room.

She caught sight of herself in the glass as she passed the dressing-table, and looked uncertainly at the plainness of her black skirt. It was hot and heavy, and the day was so warm.

She opened the wardrobe door and the first thing she saw was the white gown she had discarded the night before. She took it down and changing quickly into it, ran back to the nursery.

“We don't want hats, baby; it's so stuffy,” and catching up the child she left the room.

The old castle was a rabbit warren of small passages, and side stairs, and unexpected exits and entries, and Nanny knew every corner of it by heart. It was easy to slip out into the garden, or some part of the ruins at the back, without being observed.

She knew exactly where she intended to go. On the outer side of a break in the boundary wall was a bit of ground which was

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quite away from the beaten tracks of any one coming or going to the castle. One or two broken heaps of masonry were scattered about on the grass: over the green mounds which covered the records of days long past and gone grew daisies and clumps of nodding harebells.

It was not likely that either Sir Andrew or Lady Brewster would bring their visitors that way, for there was nothing of interest to show them. Nanny had not made up her mind yet whether she wished to be discovered or not. Perhaps it would simplify matters if she were? If her meeting with Jim took place before strangers, as a matter of course, it would make it much easier. No one would know what lay behind, except her cousin and his wife, and they would understand.

She spread a plaid, which she had brought with her, on the grass for the baby to sit on, and gathering a handful of daisies and harebells threw them into its lap. It would play with them quite happily. It was not a difficult child to amuse.

From where she sat she could see the road which ran past the Pittivie gates. It was the only road in fact, and the country was so flat that it could be seen from all sides winding its way inland from the coast.

Presently she saw two black objects in the far distance. She watched them with much interest, for she thought they meant Sir Andrew's and Lulu's return. The first carriage was probably theirs; the second would contain the friends whom they were bringing with them.

As the objects drew nearer and took a definite form she saw that she was right. She could recognise Sir Andrew's heavy double dog-cart, and the horses, because the horses were unevenly matched—a brown and a grey—and the difference of colour showed a good way off. The second carriage looked like a large waggonette, and kept at a short distance behind the other.

It was not possible to drive right up to the doors at Pittivie. Those who had planned the castle had done so with the object of defence,

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not of convenience, in their minds. The inner wall stopped all traffic, except to those who came on foot, and though Nanny could not see the people arriving, she knew what was taking place. She heard the carriages drive up to the door in the garden wall, through which Jim had been carried on the day of his accident: she heard the sounds of laughter and talking, and then she heard the rumble of empty carriages as they drove away in the direction of the stables.

She would certainly stay where she was for the present, she decided. She glanced at her watch. It was not yet four o'clock.

She leant back against the green bank, and sat still for some time. The ground smelt sweet and aromatic. There were tufts of yellow crow's-foot and wild thyme growing amongst the short turf.

"More flowers, baby?" she said presently, rousing herself. "Naughty, to pull off the heads of the pretty blue flowers," and stretching out her hand she gathered all the harebells within reach, and twisting them into a wreath

threw it laughingly on the child's brown curls.

Up went the little hands at once to pull it down.

"No!" she said. "Baby not to touch," and she held up her finger warningly.

A low bank of green crowned with daisies and waving harebells, and in the distance the shimmer of the sea. In the foreground the two white figures of mother and child. The child stretching up its dimpled arms to snatch the flowers from its head; the mother bending forward with words of soft rebuke on her lips.

That was the picture that Nanny and her baby made as they sat on the grass and played with the blue harebells.

Nanny looked up with laughter still on her lips, and saw two people coming towards her—a man and a woman. The man was her husband, and the woman was Mrs. Maynard. They had not seen her, and they were walking very slowly. She had perhaps half a minute to beat down the horrible feeling of suffocation which she felt choking her. She could

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not have moved to save her life, but she forced herself to keep her eyes fixed on those two moving figures.

Jim was walking with his head down, and leaning heavily on his stick. The woman by his side was bending so much towards him that only her profile could be seen, and the willowy outlines of her slender figure stood out in strong relief against the background of the grim old ruins. Chiffon and lace and clinging draperies trailed over the grass behind her: pale colours of the softest shades blended one into the other with subtle harmony. A scarf of amber gauze, with heavily embroidered ends, had fallen from her shoulders to below her waist. She had caught it up with one hand and was twisting and untwisting it round her wrist with the slow languid grace which characterised all her movements.

Not a look or gesture was lost upon Nanny, although Mrs. Maynard's face was turned almost away from her. She could only see where the drooping feathers curled over the brim of the hat, and lay on the waves of

shining hair, but she could have described exactly the expression in the lustrous blue eyes which were raised pleadingly to Jim's face. The sight of the woman and her beauty brought back to Nanny with a sting of pain the misery of the past. It braced her nerves. She felt the blood tingling through her veins. The fighting instinct awoke in her, and now she had a weapon to fight with which she had never had before. Instinctively her arm tightened round the little body which rested so close to her own: Jim's words of the previous night rang in her ears:

“If I loved you before, do I not love you a thousand times more as the mother of my child?”

An exultant throb made her heart beat quickly as her glance rested for a moment on the little flower-wreathed head.

She drew herself up with a new dignity, unlike the old attitude of defiance, and kept her eyes steadily on the couple advancing towards her.

CHAPTER XII

THE HAREBELL WREATH

JIM was the first to become aware of Nanny's presence. She saw him look up, and knew by the change which passed over his face that he had seen her.

Mrs. Maynard was quick to notice the change also. He had been looking worried and deadly pale the moment before. She saw the pupils of his eyes dilate suddenly and the blood mount to his brow, and she turned her head to see what had distracted his attention from herself.

She saw the two figures distinctly, for she and Jim had drawn very near, but for a moment she failed to grasp the meaning of the situation.

Her surprise at finding Jim at Pittivie had been unbounded, but she had not shown it

too obviously. She had greeted him as an old friend, and when the party had broken up to wander over the ruins, it had seemed a natural thing that they should walk together, and quite simple to manoeuvre so as to leave the others behind.

To Jim it seemed as though the opportunity he had been praying for had been flung at his head, but so abruptly that he did not know how to use it. He had allowed Mrs. Maynard to lead him where she chose, and had listened mechanically to her caressing voice as she asked questions about his accident, and murmured soft reproaches as to why he had not let her know where he was. His brain was on the rack the whole time to think how he was to put into words the question which he was determined nothing should prevent him from asking.

They had not been alone for more than a few minutes. Nanny's name had not been mentioned. Mrs. Maynard had no knowledge of where Jim's wife had been for the last year or more, whilst he had been a wanderer in

his yacht, self-banished from civilisation. She had not heard of Nanny since the night of the farewell dinner on board the *Katinata* when she had said good-bye to her with a smiling lie on her lips.

For it had been a lie. Jim had never asked her to come on the cruise up to Scotland. She had coaxed and flattered and used every blandishment she could think of to try and persuade him to take her, but he had put her off with laughing excuses, and she had understood quite well that under the light jests there had been a determination which she could never shake. It had been pure devilry that had made her tell that smiling lie. Nanny had looked happy and lovely in the hope of her coming freedom, and the man Mrs. Maynard had been sitting out with after dinner on the yacht's deck had raved about Nanny's beauty and declared she was the prettiest woman he had ever seen.

Suddenly, without a moment's warning, she found herself brought face to face with Nanny again; and after the first shock of

surprise she realised that she had no longer an impulsive girl to trick into petulant jealousy and impotent anger.

There was something peculiarly disconcerting in those clear wide-open eyes which met hers; and the sight of the child was as though some one had struck her a blow in the face.

It was so startlingly like its mother. There could be no doubt as to the relationship the one bore to the other. And Jim's stiff manner and obvious constraint when they had met that afternoon so unexpectedly was now explained! for to see Mrs. Maynard as a casual visitor to Pittivie, amongst Sir Andrew's guests, was certainly the last thing Jim could have anticipated. It had puzzled and amazed her; now, she knew.

Sylvia Maynard was a good actress, but she was taken off her guard. She rose to the occasion, but she over-acted her part. She took the initiative too quickly. She glided forward with outstretched hand and threw herself open to a rebuff.

But there was no rebuff. Nanny's self-possession saved the situation. It might have been acutely painful or absurdly melo-dramatic. It was neither! To an onlooker it would have appeared quite natural and commonplace. It did not seem even strange that Nanny should evade the outstretched hand, for, for some reason, the child was seized with an unusual fit of shyness.

It threw itself into her arms and hid its face on her shoulder.

Jim had seen Nanny in many moods, but never in one like the present. He would willingly have spared her this ordeal and he was prepared to stand by her, but he realised that she was stronger than he was; and pride in her strength kept him silent.

She had not looked at him once, yet he knew she was thinking of his feelings, and how best to pass off the meeting so as to hurt him as little as possible.

He felt he had never loved her so dearly, and mingled with his love was a very deep sense of respect and gratitude.

The contrast between the two women struck him forcibly. Mrs. Maynard's languid grace had deserted her. To cover her nervousness she rushed into a babble of talk: sentimental nonsense about the baby which set Jim's teeth on edge.

Nanny's manner was very quiet, but quite composed. She listened politely to the pretty speeches showered upon her, but always with that clear, alert look in her eyes. Mrs. Maynard broke into a little burst of enthusiasm, and poured out reproachful wonderings as to why she had never heard of the baby's existence?

"Such an old, old friend as I am," she murmured, appealing to Jim, whose silence was so discouraging that she hurried on to the subject of Pittvie and the odd coincidence of her staying in the neighbourhood with friends of the Brewsters:—anything to keep the ball of conversation rolling until she could make an excuse for putting an end to a situation which was making her feel more ill at ease than she ever remembered to have felt before.

Nanny had no wish to prolong the interview. Under her outward calm lay a feverish anxiety to give Jim the opportunity he wanted; and the strain she was putting upon herself was beginning to tell. When Mrs. Maynard bent forward, and tried to pat the little head which was still obstinately turned from her, she drew back sharply.

"Perhaps you would like to see more of the ruins," she said, forcing her voice to sound natural. "Pittivie is a very interesting old place."

"It is charming," exclaimed Mrs. Maynard. "I was just saying so to your husband when we caught sight of you sitting here."

She had said nothing of the kind, and the instant she had uttered the useless untruth she saw the frown deepen on Jim's face.

Where were her wits? She was all going to pieces, she thought angrily. She was in the habit of telling fibs by the dozen, but never before Jim. If she stayed another moment in sight of that girl's terrible eyes

she knew that she would give herself away utterly.

"Perhaps we had better move on," she said nervously. "I am with a party, you see. We will meet later, of course," and murmuring a few incoherent commonplaces, she gathered up the loose ends of her scarf.

Jim followed her, and Nanny allowed them to go a few spaces beyond where she was sitting without speaking. Then she raised her voice slightly.

"Jim!" she said.

He stopped, and would have come back, but her eyes told him that was not what she wanted.

"I don't think I will come in to tea," she said. "Will you tell Lulu, please? She will understand."

"Very well; I will tell her," he answered.

Perhaps the baby recognised his voice? It struggled up from where it was hiding its face, and looked over its mother's shoulder. It held the harebell wreath crushed in its grasp, and with a baby laugh, threw the

flowers from it, and they fell touching Jim's foot.

"My daughter hits straight," he said gravely, as he stooped to pick up the wreath, and walked on, holding it in his hand.

With a sigh of relief Nanny watched the last flutter of Mrs. Maynard's amber scarf disappear round a projecting gable.

She held the child closer.

"You are a little blessing," she murmured. "He's taken your flowers away with him! She'll have to fight hard to get him back! We've helped him all we can, baby."

Mrs. Maynard walked with a pathetic droop of her shoulders, and cried softly as she walked. It was not an unbecoming form of crying, and the tears were wiped away with a lace pocket-handkerchief before they could roll down her cheeks.

Jim had often seen her cry before. It had always made him feel rather a brute, and that he was responsible in some way for the tears.

This time he was conscious that her tears

irritated him to such a degree that he would have liked to have taken that lace handkerchief away from her and torn it into bits.

His nerves had not yet recovered from the shock of his accident. A crisis, on which the entire happiness of his life and those dear to him depended, faced him, and he required all his strength to meet it. His manhood revolted against being demoralised by a crying woman.

He walked on for some time trying to master himself before he spoke. Their steps led them back in the direction of the castle, but it was a part of the ground which was evidently little used. Nettles and weeds grew amongst heaps of stones and rubbish. A ruined tower, all except its lower storey crumbling into decay, jutted out from one of the walls, and round it the ivy hung in dense masses. A wooden bench was propped up against the ivy-covered wall. It was a lonely spot, and Jim knew that the house-party had already passed that way and were not likely to return.

"Sylvia," he said abruptly. "There is

something I must say to you before we go back to the others. Will you sit down here for a few minutes and listen to me?"

She obeyed him with a deprecating humility which he owned angrily to himself had the same irritating effect as the wet pocket-handkerchief.

She did not allow him to have the first word. She had always got the better of him when she appealed to his feelings, and she would not believe that her power over him was gone.

"Jim," she said, in the low vibrating tones he dreaded to hear. "It was almost more than I could bear. It was so unexpected, so sudden. And the sight of that little child—your child!"

She pressed her hand to the bosom of her dress.

"It brought home to me so terribly my loneliness. All that my life is cut off from. The happiness I shall never know."

Her voice fell to a whisper.

"And what might have been? Oh, Jim! when I think of those past days: that golden

year of happiness when we were engaged. All the rest of my life seems to have been a dark, dreary blank in comparison."

She raised her hand and covered her eyes. That appeal to the old days and her own loneliness could not fail to awaken his sympathy. But no response came. He tried to speak, but the words stuck in his throat. He was a generous man: generous with the single-mindedness which is perhaps more characteristic of a man than of a woman. He had never looked for motives in her conduct. Through good report and evil report he had always believed that her friendship for him was sincere. And yet—he hesitated to speak.

Then Nanny's words, and the simple directness with which she had put the choice he was to make before him, came like a guiding hand, leading him out of the web of soft words which he felt was being woven round him.

He roused himself. He knew his voice sounded harsh and unsympathetic, but he could not help it.

"Sylvia," he said, "you are my friend? You have told me so again and again. A true honest friend?"

"Can you ask me such a question?" she murmured. "You know I would—I would give up everything for you!"

"Hush!" he exclaimed peremptorily. "You must not say that." Then he added more gently, "I want you to give me up. I can no longer be your friend. I want you to let me go out of your life as though I had never been in it."

CHAPTER XIII

JIM'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

THE significance of that useless lie, which had rippled so glibly off Mrs. Maynard's tongue when she had told Nanny that she had been calling Jim's attention to the beauty of the ruins, as they drew near, had not been lost upon Jim, and he watched her closely as he spoke.

He saw an extraordinary change come over her face. It came and went quickly; like the warning flash of a beacon fire out of the darkness of the night.

He recoiled instinctively before the shock of its surprise. In that one moment of self-betrayal, she tore the scales from his eyes, and he saw her as she really was.

The shamelessness of an evil nature was painted in blazing letters on the beautiful face distorted with passion.

A sickening sense of disgust and humiliation swept over him. "Blind! blind! blind!" Nanny's words hammered on his brain. It was for this, that he had sacrificed his wife: had insulted in her all that he had bound himself to honour and protect. He had deserted her; and his unborn child! The fact that he had not known about the child when he let Nanny go from him, did not appeal to him as any manner of excuse. He had married her; taken her away from her home, a young, unsophisticated girl, peculiarly innocent of the world's ways. His care of her ought to have been so tender, so guarded, and he had deserted her for this!

He looked down at the faded flowers he still held in his grasp. He thought of the little innocent hands which had thrown them at his feet; and he allowed them to drop to the ground. They burnt his fingers. He was not worthy to touch them, and in the bitterness of his self-reproach he realised what he must have made Nanny suffer.

He heard a deep-drawn sigh, and his name

murmured in broken tones. He moved farther away from the woman sitting beside him, and kept his eyes on the ground. He did not require to look up to know that the gust of passion was past; she had once more taken up the *rôle* of the weak, defenceless woman appealing to the emotional side of his nature. Did she know that she had revealed herself to him? he wondered.

“Jim, you cannot mean what you say?” and her voice had the mournful note of one wronged and misunderstood. “Think of the past! The terrible burden which always lies upon me—my wrecked life! I”—her voice trembled—“I am not reproaching you, Jim, but you know my love was spurned—thrown back upon me, and that to drown my misery I married the man who has ruined my life; disgraced me, so that I dare not let his very existence be known.”

She struck a note of tragic despair in her last sentence, which was not without its touch of reality. Then her voice sank again to one of soft entreaty.

"And your promise, Jim? You cannot break that? Your promise that my miserable secret would be safe in your keeping, and that you would shield me from the terror which has haunted me night and day? You cannot—you cannot! Think of the past and what you were to me once! Do you forget, Jim? Can you possibly have forgotten?"

He held up his hand, and she shrank before the stern coldness of his face.

"There is not a single detail of that past which I have forgotten," he said. "To show you how willing I am to acknowledge any wrong I did you, I will not spare myself. You reminded me just now of the year of our engagement?" He paused for a moment. "What was I then?—a boy of four-and-twenty, and you were seventeen, and hardly out of the schoolroom. I fell in love with you honestly and openly. I asked you to marry me, and I thought it was the most wonderful thing in the world when I found you cared for me, and your mother sanctioned our engagement, for I was n't much of a match for you. I was

only a subaltern in an Infantry regiment, with a few hundreds a year beside my pay, and two healthy lives between me and the money which came to me a few years later."

"Those beautiful, beautiful days of long ago," murmured Mrs. Maynard. "I can hardly bear to hear you speak of them."

"I am speaking with an object," answered Jim. "It is extremely painful for me to do so. I want that past to stand out clearly in both our minds. We were to be engaged for a year. Towards the close of that year my regiment moved its quarters, and I did not see you for some time, and during that time several things happened. You were taken away from the quiet home where I had met you and launched into society by your aunt. She was a clever, brilliant woman of the world, and she was bent upon making you a success. It was not difficult! I came back to find you had taken the London world by storm. You had only to hold up your finger and you could have had almost any man you liked at your feet. I did not grudge you your triumph, be-

cause you told me that you were true to me, and that no one else's love came before mine.

"I believed you, and for a time I was happy. Then began doubts and misunderstandings, and everything went wrong, and it was I who was always in the wrong. Perhaps I was exacting and did not understand you. I was hot-headed in those days, and took my own way of hitting back, and I suppose I made a fool of myself. You accused me of flirting with another woman, and I turned on you and broke off our engagement. Oh, yes!" he said, as she tried to interrupt him. "It was all my own doing. I know exactly what was said at the time. That I had jilted you and behaved abominably, and you were well rid of me. Six weeks afterwards you accepted Maynard. When I heard who it was you were going to marry I refused to believe it. A drunkard! A gambler! A man who was n't fit to speak to an honest woman. If it had n't been for his money he would have been kicked out of society."

"You drove me to it. I was in despair!

What was life worth to me after I had lost you? I did not care what became of me!"

Sylvia Maynard gasped out her words between little pants and sobs.

"I took the blame. I am bearing the consequences of it now," answered Jim.

"You left me to my fate," she moaned. "For five terrible years I never saw you. I never even heard of you. It was more than I could bear. If you had not come to me that time I should have gone mad. I should have killed myself."

Jim corrected her statement gravely.

"That time?" he echoed. "You—mean, when you sent for me—and I came. I found you practically in the hands of a lunatic, who had gambled away his fortune, and had drunk himself into a state of degradation, and was not responsible for his actions. I took him away from you and insured your safety. I promised you that as long as he lived I bound myself to provide for him in such a way that he should never trouble your peace again. You were free to go back to the world and

take your place in it, and forget him if you could."

"And your promise of secrecy, Jim? You know how I felt about it? How the disgrace haunted me. I dreaded to think that people knew of the shadow which haunted my life."

"Yes," said Jim slowly. "I promised. I had only myself to think of then. It was six years ago. I wanted to make life as easy as I could for you, because it lay heavily on my conscience that if I had not broken my faith with you you would not have married Maynard, and this misery would have been spared you."

He paused. Now came the hardest part of his task. He had led her over the old ground purposely. He had hoped that by doing so he would touch the best side of her nature.

He steadied his voice with an effort.

"Sylvia, I did not treat my wife fairly. Before I asked her to marry me I ought to have made you release me from that promise of secrecy. It would never have harmed you.

The secret would have been as safe in her keeping as in mine. I will be perfectly plain with you—the circumstances demand it. You have come between us. She knows that you have some claim on me which I cannot explain. She will not come back to me so long as you stand between us. Can you blame her? Put yourself in her place and you will understand. Telling her the truth cannot harm you. But surely you can see that the worst possible construction must be put on my actions so long as you keep me to this bond of silence. I am not justified in keeping it. My first duty is to her. I ask you to let me go to her and clear up every doubt by telling her the simple truth. All my happiness is bound up in hers. Can you refuse to do what I ask when I put it in that light?"

"Oh, Jim—Jim—Jim!" wailed Mrs. Maynard, and the reiterated sound of his own name sickened him. "It is hard—hard. To take up my terrible burden again and go back to the old life! How can I do it?"

"I do not ask you to do that. I— " He

caught himself up quickly. His promises had cost him dear in the past, he must be careful of his words. "I want to be able to tell Nanny the whole story without any reservation. I am sure when she does hear it she will not prevent me from doing what I have done for the past six years. She will look upon it as an act of humanity; and it can be done in a way that will not cause her pain.

"I hate bringing up the subject of money, but this is no time for sentiment. With Nanny's knowledge and consent, I'm willing to undertake the cost of keeping Maynard under proper control. So far it has been done through you. You wished it, if you remember? You said it gave you a hold over him, and as you desired privacy above all things, perhaps it was better so. Now it must be worked differently. It can be done through my man of business to the person who's responsible for him."

Jim was not looking at his companion, or he would have seen her face blanch, and a

look of terror come into her eyes. She turned her head aside.

“You have always been so good,” she faltered. “I value your generosity—indeed I do. What hurts me—what I cannot, cannot bear, is that you ask me never to see you again. Take back those words, Jim. Think of my loneliness. Deserted by the one friend!” and her handkerchief went up her eyes.

“Friend?” he echoed. His temper was beginning to rise. “After what’s come and gone? Now that you know how matters stand between Nanny and myself? Don’t you think it seems rather a mockery to drag in the word friendship? You’re a woman of the world. Can’t you see the impossible position I am in? Whilst I was abroad and Nanny and the child were living here quietly with her own people it did not so much matter; but now——”

He made an impatient movement:

“I tell you she won’t come back to me unless you give up the idea of ever seeing me again,” he continued hotly, unable to control

the intense irritation which was boiling within him. "What good would friendship such as mine be to you? You force me into being absolutely brutal. Good God, Sylvia! What use have you for a man who belongs body and soul to another woman?"

He hated himself for allowing his anger to get the better of him, but she was trying him to the uttermost. A kind of sullen rage fell upon him. Pity for her died out. He would not rise from that bench until he had wrung the answer which he wanted from her.

She spoke to him with downcast eyes.

"Will you give me time to think it over?" she said, and, drawing herself up with a certain dignity, added, "I have some pride left."

"Time?" said Jim. "What do you mean by that?"

Her dignity collapsed. It would be safer to stick to her original character, she thought.

"Time to accustom myself to this parting. I will have to plan my life anew. I must sever myself from old associations. Give me

time before you tell her. To know that all my miserable life is to be laid bare before the eyes of another! I want to go away first, and be lost to the world."

Jim's irritation increased. And yet—she was taking it better than he had expected. He felt that she was yielding. Freedom to claim the love he hungered for, and which he dared to hope was not yet utterly lost to him, was almost within his reach. The knowledge softened his heart.

"What do you mean by time?" he repeated.

Swiftly her thoughts ranged themselves into some kind of order. If only she could gain time! She had not made up her mind what use she was going to make of it, but her powers of resource had never failed her yet. She would not ask for too much, for she held him by so slight a thread that she dared not run the risk of his breaking away from her. She clasped her hands together, and gazed at him imploringly.

"Give me a week—one little week is all I ask for. Out of the years of happiness which

lie before you, spare me that one short week. Give me time to hide myself. To pass out of your life for ever."

Her voice quivered and broke.

"I am doing this for your happiness. For your sake I am giving up all that makes life dear to me."

It was a fine touch of feeling and might have landed Jim on dangerous ground, but an immediate answer was spared him.

There was the sound of a high treble voice calling Mrs. Maynard's name at no great distance, and they looked up to see a young girl with a mane of flaxen hair tumbling over her shoulders running towards them.

She was the daughter of Mrs. Maynard's host, and had come with the party that afternoon, and had taken a great fancy to her father's guest.

Mrs. Maynard leant forward.

"Jim," she pleaded, "you will not refuse my last request?"

He had half risen from his seat, but he sat

down again. Words seemed to be dragged from him against his will.

“A week?” he said reluctantly. “I—well, I will not tell her for a week from to-day.”

The girl ran up to them breathless.

“Dear Mrs. Maynard,” she cried, “you must come and see the hole in the floor, where they used to throw the people down long ago. Sir Andrew’s housekeeper is going to tell us all about it, and I ran away to find you. I knew you’d be so interested, and they’re waiting for you. Do come, do come!”

She hung on Mrs. Maynard’s arm as she poured out her words excitedly, and tried to drag her along with her. Mrs. Maynard felt she would have liked to have slapped the pretty flushed face raised to hers. She revenged herself by walking as slowly as possible, and allowing her amber-coloured scarf to catch on every obstacle which came in its way.

When she reached the front door she forced herself to smile, and, disengaging the

girl's hand from her arm, pushed her from her playfully.

"Run on and tell them I am coming, and that I am so sorry to keep them waiting."

Then, as the girl vanished, she turned to Jim:

"Thank you for what you said just now—the last favour I shall ever ask of you." She hesitated and looked down. "Are you going to stay on here? I—I want to know. To feel that you are so near, and yet that such a gulf separates us! Tell me in pity, so that I may know what to do."

Jim did not answer at once. He made little marks on the gravel with his stick, and moved about the stones aimlessly. He had n't thought of what he was going to do. For a whole week he was to remain tongue-tied. How could he bear to be under the same roof with Nanny, and meet her constantly, while this cloud was still between them. He knew that he could not bear the strain.

"I shall not stay here," he said at last. "I shall go away as soon as possible—to—

morrow, most likely. There are important arrangements to make. I shall come back for her when everything is settled."

"Thank you," she murmured; and she heard the voice of the girl calling again to her from the distance.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE DEATH TOWER

IN obedience to the message sent to her in Lady Brewster's note to Nanny, Margaret had given instructions for the stone in the Death Tower to be raised. It required two men to lift it, for it was large and heavy, and had not been raised from its socket for some years.

Margaret knew all the old stories connected with Pittivie, and when visitors came to see the castle she was expected to show them over it. That afternoon she had made her preparations as usual. With a large bunch of keys in her hand she had taken a careful survey of the house and thrown wide the doors, for the many mysteries and windings of the old castle were endless.

After she had finished her duties she went

back to her own room, and, taking up her work, sat down in an arm-chair to wait until she was called for.

The afternoon was exceptionally close and warm, and she had opened all the windows to allow the mouldy smell, which arose from the gaping hole in the floor, to escape.

Some of the windows were no use as regarded light. They were mere funnel-shaped holes pierced in the thickness of the walls, and in ancient days had been used for means of warfare. From the outside they were not visible, owing to the depth of the ivy which hung over them.

The furniture in Margaret's room had been disarranged and pushed into unusual places so as to allow for a clear space round the hole in the floor. Her work-table was pressed against the wall, and her chair was beside it.

The heavy air may have made her feel drowsy; she was not aware that her eyelids had closed until she was conscious of voices close to her ear. The room was empty, but she realised at once what had happened. She

knew of the bench leaning against the ivy-covered wall outside. Some person, or rather persons, to judge from the sounds, were sitting there talking.

It was not an unusual occurrence. She picked up the work which had dropped to her lap, and prepared to go on with her sewing. The funnel-shaped hole was immediately behind her head, and its construction resembled a telephone. Words spoken outside the tower were conveyed with marvellous accuracy to the ear of the person inside it.

Margaret was a woman of peculiarly independent character. In matters of conscience she would abide by her own standard of right or wrong unhesitatingly. At first the voices on the other side of the wall did not interest her, and then she realised that one of the two persons speaking was Captain Adair. One sentence, then another, caught her attention. Her work dropped unnoticed to her lap and a curious light came into her eyes. She had grey eyes deeply set in her head; they were eyes which kept their own

counsel and seldom betrayed their owner's confidence.

Some people were afraid of Margaret. People who had once seen anger flash from those grey eyes were careful not to repeat the offence which had called it forth.

She did not know how long she sat there, quietly listening but, always as she listened the light deepened in her eyes and the lines about her mouth hardened. Then she heard a girl's voice calling. It was the voice of the young girl who had come out to find Mrs. Maynard and bring her in to hear the story of the Death Tower.

The voice rose again, and she recognised the name it was calling. She knew that the two people sitting on the bench had heard it also, and that the call was intended for one of them.

It did not serve her purpose to listen any further; she had heard enough. On the table beside her stood her work-basket, some books, and several framed photographs. She picked up one of the photographs and looked

at it. It represented a strongly built man, and the face was a masculine edition of Margaret's. The same deep-set eyes, and the same determination of character in the lines of mouth and chin.

"Davie," she said, addressing the photograph aloud, "you ken, an' I ken, that thon wuman's man has been in his grave a twelve-month."

She replaced the photograph on the table.

"An' it's her that wud cam atween the love o' husband an' wife, an' tak' the pride o' faitherhood frae a man's hairt!"

The sombre glow of a great anger gathered in her eyes, and they fell on the gaping hole almost opening at her feet.

"Thon place is no black enough for ye," she said slowly. "But yir day's come! Ye're foond oot! It's no a bit man that's agin ye noo, wha' ye can twist roond yir finger—it's Marget Robertson!"

She rose to her feet as the echo of voices and laughter came to her from the long stone passage which led to the wing of the castle

where her room was situated. The door was thrown open, and she heard Sir Andrew's voice say:

"Well, Margaret, are you here? I've brought you some visitors."

Margaret dropped the stately old-fashioned curtsey with which she always greeted her master's guests. She was known to most of them, and her individuality always commanded a certain respect.

The party clustered round her, the younger members with eager questions on their lips, and gazing down half fearfully at the ghastly reminder of the old-world tragedy.

Any one who was observing Margaret closely might have noticed that more than once she looked towards the door as though expecting some one.

Sir Andrew's voice broke in again

"Ah! here is Mrs. Maynard at last! We were afraid that you had lost your way among the ruins," he said courteously to Mrs. Maynard as she entered. "I don't know whether you will appreciate this part of the

show," he added. "It's rather a chamber of horrors."

Margaret looked past him to the woman who glided through the open door. There was something in her appearance which made her stand out from every other figure in the room. A subtle something which was more potent than her loveliness.

Margaret's eyes rested upon her for a few brief seconds. Then, in her slow grave way, she continued the story which had been interrupted by Mrs. Maynard's entrance.

Solemnly, and with a concentrated force of dramatic oratory, which startled even her master, who knew her so well, she told the story of the Death Tower and its gruesome horrors.

The sultry heat of the afternoon had deepened into a heavy gloom, and the room seemed full of shadows and lurking ghosts of the past. Margaret held her audience spell-bound, hanging upon her every word and gesture.

Mrs. Maynard crept closer to Sir Andrew, and whispered that she was frightened, but

he did not hear her. He was absorbed in watching Margaret's face. He had never heard her speak like this before, and some of the tales she told were unknown to him.

Margaret never did anything unusual unless she had some object in view. Why was she trying to frighten this group of ordinary everyday people, who were nothing to her, and were only bent on an afternoon's amusement?

Sir Andrew felt sometimes he would like very much to understand the workings of Margaret's mind.

CHAPTER XV

LADY BREWSTER "MOTHERS" JIM

JIM had followed Mrs. Maynard into the house, but when the girl ran back to her again and claimed her attention, he fell a few paces behind, and had only gone a short distance along the stone passage which led to Margaret's room, when he heard the rustle of a woman's dress behind him and a soft voice calling him by name.

He turned to find Lady Brewster almost running after him. She was laughing, and evidently amused at her own audacity in stopping him so boldly.

"You are not to go into that room," she said. "It is full of horrors: I never go! Nothing would induce me to cross the threshold, and you are not to go because you are an invalid. Think of your poor head if

you tried to look down into that dreadful hole.”

Jim smiled at her earnestness.

“It is very good of you to take care of me,” he said.

Sir Andrew had introduced his wife to Jim the morning when he had been allowed to go into the garden for the first time, but Lulu had thought he looked tired and ill and had not troubled him much with her society. On her return that afternoon she had only found time to say a few words of greeting to him as her other guests claimed her attention.

“They will stay in there for some time,” she continued, nodding in the direction of the Tower room. “And I am dying for my tea—simply dying for it. My mouth is quite parched with having to talk so much, and I hate long drives on a hot day.”

Her pretty dark eyes were raised to his. There was not a trace of coquetry in their glance.

“We will have tea together by ourselves,” she said. “I was going to begin when I saw

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you being carried off to join the crowd, and I thought it was very bad for you, and that I would run after you and rescue you."

She had turned, and, still talking and explaining and half scolding him in the way she had of appearing responsible when no responsibility was required of her, she led the way back into the hall.

"Now you are to sit there!" she said, pointing to a comfortable seat, and settling herself in a high-backed chair drawn up to the tea-table. "And you are not to try and hand things and wait upon me, because your fingers are tied up in a bag and you can't! I shall butter your scone for you, and cut it up in nice little bits just the proper size for your mouth. And do you like both sugar and cream? Is it good for you to have your tea strong? Weak tea is so uninteresting. The man who took me in to dinner last night talked a lot about food being interesting—that it ought to be interesting!"

Lulu did not expect him to join in the conversation. She busied herself with the

tea-things, and her flow of talk rippled on without effort.

Jim did not resent being made to sit still and do nothing. This woman with her pretty ways unconsciously surrounded him with a strong atmosphere of home. He felt as if he had known her for a long time, and had sat beside her in that oak-pannelled hall and drunk tea out of those old-fashioned green and white cups times without number. And this had been Nanny's home for the last six months. A feeling of profound gratitude welled up in his heart at the thought of it. How good these two people had been to her and to the child. Anger against himself made the feeling of gratitude positive pain to him. When they realised why he had left her so long to the care of strangers; that his pride had warped his sense of honour and duty; what would be their attitude towards him? he wondered.

Of course both Sir Andrew and Lady Brewster must know now who he was. Nanny must have told them, but they did not know

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that during their absence he and Nanny had met. He felt that he had no right to be sitting there accepting all the little acts of kindness which were being showered upon him. He was a fraud, and he hated acting the part of a fraud. Already he regretted having given that promise to Sylvia Maynard. Why had he done it? He ought to have been in a position at that moment to say to Lady Brewster: "Everything has been made right between Nanny and myself. She is coming back to me," and he could then have thanked her openly for all that she and her husband had done for his wife and child. One thing he must do. He must tell Lady Brewster that he was aware of Nanny's presence at Pittivie—and the sooner the better. In a few minutes they might be interrupted by the return of the rest of the party.

Lulu noticed that instead of eating the squares of buttered scone she had put on his plate he was playing with them.

"Do you not like that?" she asked. "Would you rather have something else?"

"No, thank you," he said, and suddenly made up his mind how he was going to get out of his difficulty. He remembered Nanny's message, and how she had worded it. Lulu would understand, she had said.

"Lady Brewster," he said looking her very full in the face, for he also wished her to understand. "I was asked to give you a message. Nanny told me to tell you that she did not think she would come in to tea. She said you would understand."

It was said very abruptly, and his nervousness in speaking was apparent. He saw Lady Brewster's cheeks flush, but he could have sworn that the light which came into her eyes was gladness, not anger.

She seemed uncertain for a moment, then she exclaimed quickly:

"Poor dear Nanny, but she must have her tea. I will tell them to send it out to her," and she jumped up and rang the bell.

As she sat down again she sighed.

"Did you hear that door bang in the dis-

tance?" she asked. "It means that they are all coming back. Promise—promise faithfully, that if they begin to talk about dead bones, and skeletons, and ghosts, that you will change the conversation at once! You may break a tea-cup, or upset a plate of bread and butter, or do anything you like, but you must n't let them discuss horrors!"

"I promise," said Jim. What a nice woman she was! She had grasped the situation so quickly, and with such delicate tact. There had been no explanations necessary. Everything had been put on a footing of friendly relationship without a word of question. He felt as though a heavy weight had been lifted off his shoulders.

Lady Brewster did not see Nanny until much later in the evening. She had finished dressing for dinner, and was fastening some flowers into the front of her dress, when her door opened, and Nanny came in.

"Where have you been?" she exclaimed, running up to her. "Every one has been looking for you—every one!"

She drew back at arm's length, and looked at the girl.

"Nanny," she said, "he 's a dear! Simply a dear, and he 's been dreadfully miserable and unhappy. When he gave me your message I 'd liked to have kissed him—I really would. He looked as if he wanted being comforted so badly."

Nanny went rather pale.

"I was n't sure if you knew—if—he had given you the message," she faltered. "I thought perhaps it would be better if I kept out of the way."

"Why?" demanded Lulu. "Of course you are coming in to dinner. You have n't time to change, but never mind; you look sweet in that white frock. Andrew knows about Jim! You see, we 've accepted him already as one of the family. It 's all right," she added hastily. "We had tea together—your Jim and I—all by ourselves, whilst these other people were having their blood curdled by Margaret in that terrible old Death Tower! And we did n't have any stupid explanations

or bothers; but it's all right, quite all right!
And he's adorable, Nanny."

She threw her arms round Nanny's neck.

"I'm so glad, dear. I'm quite sure all the
worries are at an end! And now we haven't
time to talk more, for there is the gong
sounding.

The small party of four, seated round the
table that evening in the Pittivie dining-
room, was a more cheerful one than it had
been the night before, although only two of
the people present kept the ball of conversa-
tion rolling.

Sir Andrew was not a great talker at any
time, but Nanny was not a silent person, and
shyness was a complaint which never troubled
her.

To-night she was both shy and silent. She
was acutely conscious of the fact that her
husband was sitting opposite her. He seemed
to take his place quite naturally in this inti-
mate home circle, and Sir Andrew and Lulu
were accepting his presence there as a matter
of course. She knew them so well, and the way

they accepted facts without inquiring into motives. They were quite under the impression that all the trouble had been cleared away. They would never ask for an explanation unless it were freely offered them.

Surely, thought Nanny, everything must have gone right. Jim could not sit there and talk to Lulu so lightly if he still had that terrible suspense hanging over him. The worn look had almost vanished from his face. He had laughed more than once at some remark of his hostess's. It was so good to hear his laugh again. It brought back the sunshine of past days, and a rush of gladness to her heart.

She bent her head, because she knew that her eyes were wet, and she was afraid that if any one saw them they might think that she was unhappy; and it was quite the other way.

Lulu was explaining to Jim, with naïve simplicity as to details, how very uncomfortable it was to be dressed in other people's clothes.

"You know," she said, "when we went

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away yesterday we had no intention of staying the night, and we had to borrow everything—everything! even tooth-brushes. Of course they were new ones! and they smelt so of a chemist's shop, and were so hard. Andrew's clothes were too small for him. You see what a long back he's got, and the tails of his coat began somewhere about his shoulder-blades. Which do you think makes a man look most sorry for himself? clothes that are too small for him or clothes that are too big? And if you had only seen me! my clothes were miles—miles too big for me!"

She threw out her hands and embraced a wide circumference.

"Andrew," she said, raising her head, the better to see across the flowers on the dinner table, "how much would that woman weigh? It took eight safety pins to get her dress even to hang on me! Twelve stone? Now say it was twelve stone."

"I would n't like to be sure, unless I had her on the weighing-machine," answered Sir Andrew, in his grave, literal way.

Lulu turned to Jim with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Is n't he deliciously Scotch?" she said. "You'll never get a Scotchman to make an assertion unless he's quite, quite sure. I'm not Scotch. I'm bits of all kinds of nationalities. It's such a comfort that I don't require to be cautious."

Lady Brewster did not stay long in the dining-room after dinner was over, and when she and Nanny had left the room, Sir Andrew and his guest, over their coffee and cigarettes, came to an understanding of each other without many words being spoken.

It would have been uncomfortable for either man to have entered into explanations. Jim's thanks for the kindness shown to himself were very sincerely expressed, and Sir Andrew was equally sincere when he said that if the accident had to happen he was glad it had happened at his doors and given him the opportunity of making Jim's acquaintance.

To bring Nanny's name into the conversa-

tion, and to speak of the enormous debt of gratitude under which he lay, Jim found much more difficult.

"I would rather you did not speak of it," interrupted Sir Andrew, quietly. "For, of course, it means that we are going to lose her. I don't know which we'll feel parting with most—Nanny or the child. The old place will miss them sadly."

Jim dropped the end of his cigarette into his plate.

"We haven't made any definite plans yet," he said hesitatingly. "Would you mind if I left them here for—say a week, and then came back again?"

"Surely, surely," said Sir Andrew, and he rose from the table as he spoke. "I won't keep you any longer. Go and find her, and settle your plans your own way," and he laid his hand kindly on the younger man's shoulder as they left the room together.

CHAPTER XVI

A RIBBON ROUND A LOCK OF HAIR

THE night was as close and sultry as the day had been, and all the doors and windows were thrown wide open. Jim stood irresolute for a few moments in the hall, uncertain what to do. There was no sign of his hostess anywhere, and Sir Andrew, saying that he had not had time yet to look at his correspondence, disappeared in the direction of his study.

Jim went over to the hall door and looked out. It was not exactly dark, but the night was thick and heavily clouded, and the gloaming was closing in.

He walked through the porch, and a few steps down the narrow pathway, which was bordered on each side by hedges of boxwood, and then stood still and listened. Not a sound

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broke the silence. The flash-light from the Mary Isle swept at intervals across the dark surface of the water, which looked black and oily in its almost unnatural calm, for on that rugged coast the voice of the sea is seldom silent.

He leant forward a little, and watched for the next flash to gleam on the low stone wall which hung over the edge of the cliff. Yes! his eyesight seldom played him false, even in the dusk. He saw a white figure distinctly and he walked straight towards it.

Nanny knew that he would come to look for her, and she had no intention of hiding herself. She was waiting for him, and she had been listening to the faintest sounds of movement in the house. In the intense silence the slightest noise carried easily. She had heard the dining-room door open; she had seen Jim come out into the porch; the outline of his figure was clearly defined against the light which streamed from behind him, and she knew when he first caught sight of her.

As she saw him coming towards her, she

fought wildly with the feeling of suffocation which was catching at her throat. It was squeezing the breath out of her, and she wondered if it would allow her to utter a single word.

She felt him touch her dress, and then stand quite still. So still that she could hear the sound of his breathing. It came quickly and irregularly. She knew he was fighting down some strong emotion, and her heart went out impulsively to meet the words which she knew hovered on his lips.

She felt for his hand in the darkness, and drew him close to her. The wall was flat and broad, and only raised about two feet above the ground at the place where she was sitting. She drew him down, down, until he was close beside her.

"Jim," she whispered. "It's all right, I know it is. Something tells me it is. She has let you go? Perhaps I wronged her. She has given you your release? Whatever the promise was which bound you, has been taken back?"

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“Yes—she has given me my release—she—has let me go,” he answered huskily.

With a little sob of gladness Nanny put her arms round his neck, and laid her head on his shoulder. She gave a long sigh, like that of a tired child who has found the resting-place it longs for.

“I am so happy. You are happy too, are n't you?” she said softly. “Are you so happy that you can't speak, Jim?”

She was content to lie still. It was enough to know that it was Jim's shoulder she was leaning against.

But his arm did not tighten round her, and he did not attempt to kiss her. Perhaps he was thinking of the night before, when he had taken her by surprise, and he had thought she was angry, and she had run away from him. It was different now; surely he must know that?

She moved her head, so that she could look up at him.

“Is it because you are so happy that you cannot speak?” she repeated, murmuring the words low in his ear.

The beacon light flashed for a second across his face and she saw it distinctly. It showed that he was still in the grasp of some struggle, but at her touch the lines about his mouth grew more set.

He tried to disengage her arms from about his neck, but she would not raise her head.

"Why do you do that?" she pleaded. "Are you going to give me reasons and explanations?" The old impetuous Nanny came back, and she exclaimed vehemently. "I don't want them! I won't have them! I told you I did n't want them. I told you it was enough for me to know that she was to go out of your life, and that you were never to see or hear of her again. And you say that it is to be so. I do not ask for anything more."

For one brief moment he held her to him very tightly, and then put her away with a firmness she could not resist.

"You are very generous," he said. "Far more generous than I deserve. But there is something I must tell you. I am free in one sense, but I am still bound by a certain con-

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dition. I don't know whether I did right in giving in to it. It's been worrying me all the evening. I had hoped to have been able to tell you the whole story at once and have done with it, but——”

He hesitated for a moment.

“She asked me to wait for a week. And—I said I would. There are things you must be told. Your consent on a certain subject is necessary; and I must be able to tell you everything.”

Nanny turned her head away from him.

“Is it necessary to tell me things? I trust you.”

She was making it very hard for him—much harder than she knew. The same feeling was on him now; stinging him with its sense of humiliation, which had made him drop the little harebell wreath from his fingers as though it burnt them.

“I don't feel as if I had the right to touch you, or accept the love you offer me, so long as there is a thought in my heart you cannot share,” he said.

She still kept her head turned from him.

"A whole week!" he heard her murmur.
"A whole week, and to see him every day!"

He laid his hand for a moment on hers, and then withdrew it quickly.

"I am going away," he said. "I shall go to-morrow, and come back when the time is over."

She leant her cheek on her hand, and sat for a long time without stirring.

"I must go away," he repeated a little unsteadily. "Don't you see that?"

"When do you go?" she asked, and her voice sounded very toneless.

"As early as I can. I've told your cousin I'm going. He understands—all there is to understand, at least."

"To-morrow 's Sunday," said Nanny, quickly.

"It can be managed," said Jim, doggedly.
"I've looked it all up."

Nanny rose abruptly.

"We will go in," she said. "It makes it so difficult when there's nothing more to say."

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He followed her up the pathway, and did not speak until they came within the circle of light which lit up the porch.

"I suppose the child's asleep?" he said.

"Oh, yes, hours ago," she answered listlessly.

"May I see her?" he asked. "There may not be an opportunity in the morning if I go early."

She flushed and looked undecided. Then she made a gesture of assent, and walking before him, led the way up the narrow winding staircase towards the nursery.

The door stood ajar, and Margaret was sitting in a low chair by the child's cot. A shaded light was on the table beside her, but her hands were folded idly on her lap, which was unusual.

She rose at once when she saw who stood in the doorway, and left the room quietly.

Nanny went over to the table and moved the lamp so that it would throw more light on the sleeping child, without shining on its face, and drew back into the shadow.

She wondered what he would do. The

little mop of brown curls was turned away from him. The night was very warm, and both the baby arms were thrown out across the coverlet. The outline of the flushed cheek and the upward curve of the eyelashes showed clearly against the whiteness of the pillow.

She saw him bend over almost to the level of the cot, and she thought he was going to kiss one of the soft little arms just where the dimple showed at the curve of the wrist. Perhaps he was, but he drew himself up sharply, and stood motionless, looking down on the sleeping face.

Nanny saw his lips move, and then he turned away and went towards the door.

She caught up something from the table, which glistened in her hand under the light, and leaning over the child, she snipped off one of the tiny brown curls.

A piece of ribbon lay on the table, and she picked it up hurriedly.

Jim had reached the door. Another second and he would have passed through it, when he felt that she was standing beside him. He

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looked down and saw what she held in her hand. She was twisting the ribbon round the lock of hair.

“Keep it,” she whispered, thrusting it into the breast of his coat. “Don’t let it be taken away from you.”

The tears were running down her cheeks.

“Go,” she said, but as he did not move she pushed him from her with both hands. “Go,” she repeated, and slipping back into the room, she closed the door noiselessly behind her.

CHAPTER XVII

JIM'S DEPARTURE

BEFORE he left Pittivie, Jim bade a special farewell to Margaret, and he made a point of finding her alone at the time.

He had grown very fond of his nurse during his illness. Margaret was a person who inspired confidence in the minds of those with whom she came into personal contact.

She had contrived for him a wonderful kind of glove, which was to take the place of the bandages in which his injured hand had been swathed, and he was amused at the critical interest she took in the result of her work when she saw it in use for the first time.

"I can see that I have fingers now," he said smiling. "Rather of the gate-post order,

but there 's some feeling in them," and he tried to move his fingers backwards and forwards.

He had said good-bye and was turning away, when he hesitated.

"You will take care of them for me—won't you, Margaret?" he said, looking into the deep-set eyes.

Margaret did not require to ask what he meant by "them"!

"Ye needna' fear," she answered quietly. "I 'll take care o' them, till ye come back."

Then she added, as though an idea had suddenly occurred to her:

"Ye 'll have left yir address wi' Sir Andry—nae doot?"

"Oh, yes," said Jim. "I 've left my address. I shall be in London."

"Maybe ye wouldna' mind leavin' it wi' me forbye," she suggested.

"Certainly; I should like you to have it," and taking the piece of paper she brought to him he scribbled down as well

as he could the name and address of his London Club.

“There,” he said; “that will find me,” and the next minute he was gone.

Life at Pittvie settled back again so quietly into its usual routine after Jim’s departure, that by the end of the first day Nanny found herself wondering if all that had come and gone had not been a dream.

She had sobbed herself to sleep that night after she had said good-bye to him; but she was young, and her spirits had the elasticity of youth. A kind of restless excitement impelled her to throw herself into whatever came uppermost to do. A week was not such a very long time. It could be counted by hours easily. By Monday morning the restless mood had passed into a calmer one of settled expectancy.

After lunch Lulu retired to her own room with a novel. She had given herself a headache picking flowers in the garden in the sun without a hat, and declared her intention of not appearing again until tea-time; and Sir

Andrew had started off to walk to an out-lying part of the estate to watch the progress of his harvesting.

Nanny had the house to herself, and in her present mood the rest and peace of its old-world quiet was exactly what she desired most. She wandered into the drawing-room, which faced south and looked out across the water, and chose a chair where the breeze would blow in on her through the open window. It must be low tide, she thought, because the smell of the sea-weed mingled with the scent of newly cut grass. She heard the whirr and rattle of the grass machine as it was rolled backwards and forwards. She knew by the direction whence the sound came that they were cutting the strip of grass by the low wall where she and Jim had sat the night before he left.

He had never been out of her thoughts for a moment. That briny smell of the sea brought back the memory of all kinds of incidents, connected with their wandering life abroad, with startling distinctness. Those

first two years of happiness after her marriage were all bound up with associations of the sea. The big white yacht had been the happiest home she had ever known, and they had roamed from place to place wherever their fancy took them.

She lay back against the cushions and shut her eyes. She wanted to dream what it would be like to live that life over again.

What would he do? she wondered, when he came back. The warm colour crept up into her cheeks. He would take them both away at once, she felt quite sure of that. He would want them all to himself, and she knew she would give him his own way in everything. Whatever he said would be sure to be right. Perhaps he had sent orders for the yacht to come north, and they would vanish away into a world of their own, as they had done before, when they had started on their two years' honeymoon. That letter of Captain Cragg's which she had read—and she felt hot at the recollection of the pocket-book, and how she had treated it—implied that the

Katinata was not to be laid up after her long cruise. He had mentioned some repairs which were being hurried on as quickly as possible. That looked as though she were to be made fit to start again at a moment's notice.

Nanny opened her eyes, and they rested on the broad stretch of the blue Firth shimmering and sparkling in the sunshine. If she watched carefully, she might one day see the *Katinata* pass up on her way to some sheltered anchorage. She would recognise her easily if she did not keep far out. So few yachts passed along that coast; it was too unprotected to appeal to the ordinary yachtsman, unless some special object drew him to its shores.

She shut her eyes again, and went back to her dreams. Her vivid imagination was so busy with them that she did not pay attention to any sounds of movement about the house. Callers were not frequent at Pittivie, and she roused herself with a start when the door was thrown open and the servant announced a name which fell on her ears with the stupefying effect of a sudden shock.

The warm air blowing through the open window pierced her like a chill draught as she watched Mrs. Maynard walk up the long room. She did not rise from her chair, she did not know whether she could have done so if she had tried, and Mrs. Maynard this time made no attempt at holding out her hand.

She walked slowly, with her usual languid grace, and sinking into a seat quite close to Nanny's looked at her without speaking.

It was the look of a trapper, who for some purpose of his own has caught a live animal in his net. She was neither hurried nor excited for she had discovered by a few cleverly-put questions to the servant, who answered the door to her, that Mrs. Adair was alone; and it had been very simple to imply that her visit concerned Mrs. Adair principally and not Lady Brewster.

Sylvia Maynard was a desperate woman, and she had made up her mind to use desperate means to gain her ends; but she retained perfect control over her manner, and nothing

was visible of the passion of rage and terror which surged within her.

It was not conscience which troubled her. She had not been aware of possessing one for so long that it had ceased to have any meaning for her. It was the blind instinct of self-preservation, which swallowed up every other consideration. The sensuous pleasures of life, which were the only things she cared for, were to be torn from her. Disgrace and ruin stared her in the face. Her one hope of escape lay in the use she was able to make of the chance of finding Nanny alone and unprotected. The ground would be cut away from under her feet the moment Nanny knew by what a flimsy thread she had held her power over Jim, and discovery of her treachery would follow swiftly on Jim's explanation; for he would find out that he had been the dupe of a sordid plot to extract money out of him under false pretences. She was practically a criminal, and the terrors of the law held all the more awful possibilities to her because she was very ignorant concerning its powers.

The two women faced each other silently. The blood began to tingle through Nanny's veins. She was not a patient person, and she did not know how to play a waiting game. She was the first to speak.

"Why have you come here?" she asked.

CHAPTER XVIII

YOU ARE NOT SPEAKING THE TRUTH

MRS. MAYNARD felt that her luck was following her. She had found Nanny alone; she was now scoring a second point in making her speak first, and the question gave her the opening she desired.

"Because there are some things which I have to say to you," she said. "I think it is only right that you should know of them."

Nanny returned her look without flinching.

"I will not hear them from you," she said. "Whatever it is that is necessary for me to know will be told me by my husband."

Mrs. Maynard turned her head and looked out of the window. The action implied that if possible she wished to spare the listener's feelings. She let her words fall slowly from

her lips, distinct and clear as raindrops falling from a window-sash after a summer shower.

“You will not hear the story as you ought to be told it. He will tell you of things which happened long ago. It will be all quite true, but he will not tell you of things which have happened in those latter years—since—his marriage. He wants you to go back to him, I know. He will not tell you the whole truth. He dare not. If he did, you would never go back to him as his wife.”

Nanny put her fingers in between the collar of her thin silk shirt and her neck to loosen the tightness. It felt as if it were choking her.

How dare the woman speak to her like that? She was so angry that she could hardly keep her voice steady when she answered.

“You are not telling the truth. I do not believe what you say for a single moment.”

Mrs. Maynard looked at her quietly. There was something horrible in the quietness of her manner.

“Why has he gone away?” she asked,

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"for they told me at the door that he had left two days ago."

Nanny was thrown off her guard. The question was so simple.

"Because you made him give that promise—that promise to keep silent for a week. You had no right to ask such a thing of him," she concluded hotly.

The demon of luck seemed to be dogging Mrs. Maynard's every word. Each move in the game she was playing had been a random shot. She did not know from one moment to another what chance would throw into her hands.

She gazed at Nanny wonderingly.

"I made him give a promise? What promise? I do not understand."

"You understand perfectly well," retorted Nanny. She leant forward, holding one hand tightly over the other. She was in a white heat of anger. It was all she could do to keep her fingers locked together. She longed to tear something; to rend asunder the veil of deceit which was being woven before her eyes.

“You need not try to blind me,” she continued rapidly. “You never have blinded me. I have known you for what you are from the very first minute I saw you. You have blinded Jim. You have worked on him through his generosity and his chivalry, and some mistaken idea of honour which you have done your best to dishonour. He pledged me his word here—in this house, only three days ago, that he had never wronged me in thought or in deed, and I told him that I believed him. Unless he stands before me, and I hear him confess with his own lips that what he said was a lie, I will not take your word against his. You do not know what truth is. Jim has never told a lie. He could not!”

She leant back breathless against the cushions of her chair. She felt that she was shaking all over, but her eyes were as steady as before, and they never left Mrs. Maynard's face for a moment. She saw her pass her handkerchief over her mouth and go as white as the lace at her throat.

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Nanny had said her say. She vowed inwardly that she would not utter another word in her husband's defence. It was unworthy of her trust in him to stoop to vindicate his honour. Why did the woman stay? she asked herself. How could she, after listening to what she had told her? Was she lost to all sense of shame and decency? She would give her two minutes. If she did not leave the room of her own accord by then, she would ring the bell and order her to be shown out. She glanced at the little gold clock on the mantelpiece. Two minutes—not a second longer, and she folded her hands in her lap and waited.

Mrs. Maynard played her last card. She knew it was her last and her strongest, and she laid it down, still with that horrible quietness in her manner which had characterised each move of her game.

“If you go back to him, you will find out the truth sooner or later. It is kinder to tell you now, so that you may be spared the pain of having to leave him a second time. For three

years before your husband married you—and ever since—he has paid me a settled income.”

She glanced down at her dress. Its elaborate simplicity in no way disguised the fact of its costliness.

“He is not a man who does things by halves,” she murmured. “What he gives he does not give grudgingly,” and she raised her head and watched the effect of her words.

No woman, she argued to herself, could be so besottedly in love with a man as to allow a confession such as she had just made to pass unchallenged. Nanny’s expression baffled her. Her eyes were widely opened and fixed full upon her, but not a shadow of doubt blurred their clearness.

“You are not speaking the truth,” she said, without a tremor in her voice. That one sentence kept repeating itself over and over again in the girl’s brain. She prayed that her senses would not play her false and that that one sentence would remain fixed as an anchor of safety to hold by till the strain was over.

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Mrs. Maynard allowed something of her guarded control to slip from her. It was not that she felt that she had failed, but the moment had come when a display of feeling might help her cause.

"I would spare you if I could. Am I not humbling myself in the dust to make you see the truth?" she cried brokenly. "Why has he left you? Why did he say that I had sent him from you? What reason can he have for wishing for a week's delay? Do you not see? Do you not understand the struggle which must be going on in his mind?"

Nanny's face was set like a flint. She felt like an automaton that could only say one sentence intelligibly.

"You are not speaking the truth," she repeated. She knew that she uttered the words but it was only a mechanical action of the brain which prompted the sound of speech.

"And you will not be saved?" murmured Mrs. Maynard mournfully. "I have done all that I could. My humiliation has been in vain?"

She drew her handkerchief backwards and forwards through her fingers and she looked down at the folds of her dress which lay on the carpet beside her chair.

“You say that you do not believe me. My words fail to convince you—but his words? Could you disbelieve them? His own written words. His letters to me for the past six years. I have not parted with one of them. I could not have borne to destroy them.”

She clasped her hands convulsively and looked out of the window.

“He always wrote to me himself. What he did for me, he did of his own free will. He gave willingly and ungrudgingly. I have it in his own words.”

She dropped her voice almost to a whisper.

“No eyes but mine have ever been permitted to see these letters, but if nothing else will convince you of the terrible mistake you will make if you allow yourself to be blinded to the duty you owe to yourself and your child, then I will show them to you. You can judge him by the evidence of your own sight.”

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At the mention of the child's name Nanny's face changed. The strong primal instinct of motherhood, which teaches a woman that love for her child is a thing which belongs to the holiest part of her nature, had never been thoroughly roused until that moment. It rushed into being with a strength which frightened her.

She sprang to her feet. A flood of crimson staining her white cheeks, and her eyes blazing.

That woman to take her child's name on her lips! If she stayed in the same room with her for another moment she knew that she would not be responsible for what she did.

She walked quickly across to the bell and put her hand on it. She did not ring it. She stood with her back to it, and her other hand pointing towards the door.

"If you do not go this very instant, I will have you turned out of the house," she said.

Mrs. Maynard had risen at the same time that Nanny had sprung to her feet, and she felt herself quail mentally and bodily before the look in the girl's eyes. She tried to gather

herself together and draw round her a remnant of dignity as she walked up the long room, but it was a failure. She had very nearly reached the door and was putting out her hand to open it, when Nanny's voice rang out sharply.

"Stop," she cried; "come back." And though it was torture to have to face the scorn and contempt of the woman she hated, a power stronger than she could resist forced Sylvia Maynard to turn and retrace her steps.

Nanny's words cut clear and incisive.

"You have shamed yourself to no purpose. I do not believe in the charge you bring against my husband. He has given me his word that he is innocent of all wrong towards me. I will take his word, not yours."

As she finished speaking her hand tightened over the handle of the bell and she rang it peremptorily.

Mrs. Maynard remained standing where she was. She tried to speak and could not. She tried to move, but her limbs failed her. That stern young figure in the black dress,

drawn rigidly up against the panelled wall, and the contempt in the clear eyes held her fixed to the spot.

Steps sounded, coming rapidly across the hall, and the servant who had answered the door a short time before entered.

She looked a little flurried. The bell had rung with such violence that she thought something unusual must have happened.

"Mrs. Maynard's carriage," said Nanny, and without waiting to see how Mrs. Maynard took herself out of the room, she walked back to her chair by the window.

For a long time she sat there looking out blankly in front of her. She heard a voice speaking, and recognised, without any surprise that it was her own, and that she was talking to herself.

"I defied her to the very last," she heard herself say. "She has gone away knowing that I do not believe her. I did not give in to one single thing. I told her from the very beginning to the very end that she was telling lies."

A spasm of pain contracted her face. She crouched back in her chair.

“Am I so very sure?” and she moved her head restlessly like a person in pain.

“Jim, Jim, why did you go away? Why did you leave me at her mercy? What made you promise to keep silence for a week?”

Her voice ceased, and then went on again wearily.

“Did she make him give that promise? Was she speaking the truth or a lie when she said she did not know what I meant? Only three days gone! Four days yet to come and go before I see him again and know what it is that he has to tell me! Will my trust in him last out the time? Every word she has said will come back and torture me day and night. I know they will. The hateful, horrible words are creeping back now. Why did he leave me? Why, why?” she repeated helplessly.

CHAPTER XIX

A COMPROMISING PARASOL

AN hour or so later, when Lady Brewster came into the drawing-room she found Nanny still sitting in the chair by the window.

"I believe you 've been asleep," she said, bending over her. "Come and have tea. It may not be as delightful as your dreams, but it is more sociable."

It did not take Lulu long to discover that there was something very wrong with Nanny. The tea hour, which was usually a cheerful time at Pittivie, failed to arouse her to any kind of interest in what was going on. Lulu's heart ached for her, and she made several attempts to break down the barrier of reserve which Nanny seemed suddenly to have drawn round her.

Was it reserve? Lulu wondered, or was

Nanny ill? She looked only half alive. Her troubles had never affected her in this way before. On the night of Jim's accident she had poured her heart out in wild regrets and tears and passionate protests of remorse, and it had been like her to do so. It was her own impulsive, impetuous self, but this was something quite different.

Before the evening was over Lulu had worked herself into the firm conviction that Nanny was ill, or going to be ill. Sir Andrew treated her fears with his usual caution, and she almost found it in her heart to be angry with him because he would not be alarmed.

Instinctively she turned to the comforter who never thought her troubles too small or her anxieties groundless. The stern side of Margaret's character was unknown to Lulu. She recognised its strength only, and drew on it ungrudgingly. She never thought of Margaret as an inferior. She was the all-pervading influence in the house, of order and strength and comfort. No secrets were kept

from her, because she had never been known to betray a trust.

Margaret listened to all that Lady Brewster had to say. She had come as usual to her mistress's room, the last thing at night, to see that she had everything she required, and went about her duties with methodical precision.

Perhaps it was the weather that had affected Mrs. Adair, she suggested, as she altered the position of the lamp, and arranged the books on the table within easy reach of Lady Brewster's hand.

There had been thunder hanging about for the last few days. Her ladyship had not felt well herself that afternoon. She would go round by the nursery later on and see if all was right, she said.

Nanny slept at night beside the child's cot, and Margaret passed the nursery always before going to her own room. Outside the door she paused, but she did not knock as she had intended to do. The sound of heart-broken sobs, vainly stifled, struck on her ear.

If it had been her mistress, she would have gone into the room and soothed and comforted her. Long years ago Margaret had passed through the fire of suffering, and she knew! She recognised the note of agony which throbbed through that sound of muffled weeping. Only the hand which had dealt the blow could heal the wound.

“She’s greetin’ for her man, an’ he’s hurted her sair,” she murmured, and the tears glistened in her grey eyes. “Puir lamb! It’s him, no me, wha can help her,” and with hushed footsteps she passed softly on her way.

It was her custom to make the round of the house at night and see that the doors were shut and all the maids were off to bed by ten o’clock. Margaret allowed no loitering by moonlight, or any other light, after a certain hour. There were no men-servants kept in Pittivie household and with the exception of the maid who had answered the door that afternoon to Mrs. Maynard, all the other servants had been in service at the castle for some time.

This particular girl Margaret did not approve of, and had every intention of parting with as soon as she could find another to fill her place. She was a Pittivie girl, born and bred, but had gone out into the world and come back with certain modern ideas, and a mincing English accent which Margaret did not consider either necessary or becoming.

It was close upon eleven o'clock, for Margaret had been delayed longer than usual in Lady Brewster's room, but she found that, according to the ordinary rules, the doors were locked, and the servants had gone to bed. The only unusual thing which attracted her attention was a light coming from underneath the pantry door, and an annoyed expression crossed her face as she saw it.

"Readin' trashy novelettes, instead o' bein' in her bed like ony decent lassie at this time o' nicht," she said to herself, and opening the door walked into the pantry.

The girl was sitting with her elbows on the table and her eyes glued to the flimsy sheets of paper spread out before her. Her cap was

tossed aside, and her rumpled hair and flushed cheeks were a flattering tribute to the interest of the story she was devouring greedily.

She turned with a start when the door opened and she recognised the tall figure standing in the entrance.

Margaret's glance went past her to the table. The cap was lying there. It was an eyesore in itself: a senseless thing which was no cap at all: a bow of starched muslin with long streamers hanging from it, which were always getting in the way of its owner.

But there was something else lying beside the cap, which looked strangely out of place on the bare wooden table. It was a lady's parasol: a lovely indescribable thing of chiffon of the softest shades of colour. Round the handle was twisted a gold serpent. The cruel flat head was encrusted with jewels, and a pair of emerald eyes gleamed wickedly under the light of the lamp.

Margaret walked up to the table and looked more closely at the parasol. She did not know of any visitors having been at the castle

that afternoon. She had been called away to see a sick woman in the village, and had not returned till late. As a rule, she was always informed of anything which took place in her absence, and her surprise was mingled with rebuke when, in answer to her question as to whom the parasol belonged, the girl replied that it had been left behind by a lady who had called that afternoon.

“An’ what’s it daen here?” asked Margaret.

The girl was afraid of Margaret, but she always tried to appear as though she were not.

“I was going to do it up in a parcel and send it by the carrier in the morning. I know whom to send it to,” she answered rather pertly. “The lady who left it was here the other day with the party who came back that afternoon with Sir Andrew and her ladyship.”

“Wha gave you leave tae send paircels tae the gentry wha comes tae the hoos wi’oot lettin’ me ken?” said Margaret slowly.

Her Scotch tongue compared forcibly with the other’s glibness of speech.

The girl stammered something to the effect that she thought she was doing her duty.

“Your duty, Jemima Brown, is tae dae what ye ’re bid, an’ it’s tae me that ye ’ll come for yir orders. Mind that. Which of the leddys was it?” she asked.

Jemima was about to launch into a glowing description of Mrs. Maynard, whose personality she had been fitting into that of the heroine of the story she had been reading; but something in Margaret’s expression checked her volubility. She had not said half a dozen words before Margaret knew whom she meant.

“Her leddyship was no seein’ visitors this aifternin,” she said, looking at the girl closely. “What way did ye come tae let ony leddy in?”

Jemima Brown explained that the lady had asked to see Mrs. Adair, and that she had shown her into the drawing-room, and that she had stayed for quite half an hour.

“An’ ye shewed her oot?” asked Margaret. The girl tossed her head.

"Deed," she exclaimed, lapsing momentarily into her native dialect. "Some folks gives their orders as if the hale place belonged tae them."

She fell back again into her cultivated English accent.

"'Mrs. Maynard's carriage!' That was the order I got from Mrs. Adair, as proud as you like."

Margaret had heard enough, without requiring that last remark to force conviction on her mind. A sombre light had begun to smoulder in her deep-set eyes. She picked up the parasol, and locking the novelette into the table drawer, put the key in her pocket. She had brought a lighted candle with her into the pantry, for the passages outside were dark. She turned down the lamp and it went out with a sputter.

"'Awa' tae yir bed," she said sternly, and held the candle above her head to allow Jemima Brown to find her way through the door and stumble up the steps which led to her own room.

Margaret waited until all was quiet. Then she shut the pantry door, and setting the candle on the table and laying the parasol beside it, began to walk noiselessly backwards and forwards over the stone-flagged floor.

Her chin was sunk on her chest and she was thinking deeply as she passed to and fro. Every time she neared the table the green eyes in the jewelled head of the serpent flashed in the flicker of the candle light. By degrees she became dimly conscious that in some subtle way those green eyes were magnetising her brain. They were forcing an inspiration into it. The few minutes' cross-questioning of Jemima Brown had made a great many things plain to her. Lady Brewster's instincts had led her right. Something had happened that afternoon to Mrs. Adair to cause her great suffering, and the suffering had been mental, not bodily. Margaret had the evidence of her own ears to vouch for that, and she knew that the power lay in her hands to bring to justice the cause of that suffering.

Hidden in her mind for the last three days and nights had been the knowledge of a secret which she had not known how to use. Now she knew. A crisis had come, and she must use her knowledge, and use it as quickly as possible. She must speak face to face with that woman who was trying to wreck the lives of the people whose happiness Margaret wished to see complete.

She could seek an interview with Mrs. Maynard by going to the house where she was staying and asking to see her, but she would rather avoid that course. She did not wish to go to Mrs. Maynard. She wanted Mrs. Maynard to come to her. She was fully aware of the importance of making her enemy meet her on her own ground. Mrs. Maynard must be made to come to Pittivie, but how was that to be managed? It was a question which puzzled her sorely.

She came to a standstill by the table, and looked down at the parasol.

The stem of it was of dark-coloured bamboo, and the section of the wood strongly defined.

The coils of the serpent's body were twisted closely together round the thick stump of the handle, and the jewelled head reached to within an inch of the top. The emerald eyes fascinated her. They shone so brilliantly, and had a wicked gleam in them.

"Are ye real or fause?" she murmured, and put her finger on one of the glittering stones and rubbed it.

To her astonishment the eye disappeared, and with a sharp click the end of the bamboo stem sprang open like the top of a scent-bottle.

She sat down in the chair drawn up to the table and drew the candle nearer.

She turned over the parasol curiously. The inside of the hollow stem was stuffed full of letters. They were so tightly wedged in that she had to take one of the knitting needles from the bag which hung at her side and dig it into the hole before she could get any of them out.

She spread them on the table before her, and turned them over with the point of the

needle as though they had been some kind of noxious animals. She had no intention of reading them. Even if she had, she might not have understood their full meaning. They would have thrown sidelights on some curious incidents in Mrs. Maynard's history. But the fact of their being hidden where they were, and of her having discovered their existence, was sufficient for Margaret's purpose. The value of what she had found lay in the fact, that she now held in her hands a means of bringing Mrs. Maynard to Pittivie.

"Folk that pit things in hidy-holes are aye feared tae be foond oot," she said to herself grimly, as she replaced the letters, using the knitting needle as much as possible, so that her fingers should not come into contact with them.

Her brain was working rapidly all the time.

Mrs. Maynard might return of her own accord to claim her property; probably she would. She would be afraid the parasol

might fall into the hands of a careless messenger, but Margaret had no intention of leaving anything to chance. The lines of her mouth set determinedly when she remembered the promise she had given to Jim the morning of his departure.

“I was to tak’ care o’ them till he cam’ back. A bonny like wey I’ve keepit ma wurd. Lettin’ thon wuman nigh ane o’ his lambs!”

She again took up the candle and the parasol, and leaving the pantry made her way to her own room in the old tower. She had no hesitation as to what she was going to do. She opened an old-fashioned writing-desk and spread a sheet of notepaper before her. She first wrote the date and address, then a few lines in her clear, precise handwriting, and putting it into an envelope, addressed and stamped it.

Margaret was homely of speech, and spoke her native tongue with pride; but she was not an illiterate woman, and could write and spell in good English.

She put the letter into her pocket, and throwing a shawl over her head let herself out of the house by a side door. A pathway led through the castle grounds to a road which ran along the cliff in the direction of the village. It was light enough to see her way, and not more than a few minutes' walk to the post-office. The good folk of Pittivie had been in bed and asleep hours before, and she dropped her letter into the box, and returned to the castle without having seen any sign of life. The post gig started at six o'clock in the morning on its way to the nearest town, and the postman delivered the local letters as he went along. Mrs. Maynard would receive that letter probably with her morning cup of tea.

Margaret smiled a little as she let herself in again at the side door and locked it behind her. The tower room looked very ghostly as she returned to it. The stone slab had been replaced over the mouth of the hole in the floor, but the carpet had not been laid down again, and the massive iron ring by

which the stone was raised or lowered was left plainly visible.

“We ’ll hae oor bit talk here, I ’m thinkin’,” she remarked to herself. “It ’s quiet like. We’ll no be interrumpit.”

CHAPTER XX

THE TRAPPING OF THE SYREN

MARGARET was not a person to entangle herself in useless mysteries. She had worded her letter very simply, because she was sure that simplicity would gain her object more effectively than a message calculated to rouse fear.

She made a pretty shrewd guess as to what had happened that afternoon when Mrs. Maynard had called. The interview had evidently terminated unpleasantly. Mrs. Adair had practically turned her out of the house. Margaret was quite sure of that, and she was also sure that neither Sir Andrew nor Lady Brewster had been told of the visit.

But Mrs. Maynard was not to know that Sir Andrew and Lady Brewster were in ignorance of her having been at Pittivie. She

would be very anxious to recover her parasol, and considering its secret value, glad to have it given back into her own hands. If she knew that the family were to be from home, and that she had only a servant to deal with, she would come herself to fetch it.

All this Margaret argued out to herself. Her letter was a respectful communication to say that if Mrs. Maynard was the lady who had left a parasol at the castle the day before, it was in safe custody. As the family were to be from home the following afternoon, would any one calling for the parasol ask for the housekeeper.

It sounded most simple. The parasol with its jewelled handle was too valuable a thing to be sent touring about the country-side in search of a possible owner. It ought to be given into safe hands, and the remark about the family being from home gave Mrs. Maynard the satisfaction of knowing that if she called at Pittivie she would not be obliged to see any one whom she did not wish to meet.

It would also be quite true about the

family being from home if things turned out as Margaret expected. Every summer Sir Andrew gave an entertainment to the village children and the entertainment was to take place that afternoon. If the weather were fine it was to be held in a field at some little distance from the castle. Experience had proved that the ruins and precipitous cliffs were dangerous attractions for small children and this particular field was quite safe and not inconveniently near.

The entertainment generally went on from three till six, and it was the custom for the Pittivie household to turn out *en masse* to help in the amusements. A tent was erected, and an enormous tea was provided. Mrs. Adair would be almost certain to go on this occasion, and she would take the child with her.

It was Margaret's duty to see that all the preparations for the entertainment were made, but it was not necessary for her to be present. When Mrs. Maynard rang the front-door bell at Pittivie, shortly before four o'clock, it was

not answered by Jemima Brown, but by a rosy-cheeked girl, who had received her instructions from Margaret, and who had no ideas in her head beyond doing what she had been told to do, and then hurrying off to join the crowd in the field by the shore, where her fellow-servants had preceded her.

Mrs. Maynard had carried away with her a very confused idea of the architectural peculiarities of Pittivie. If she had been conducted by the rosy-cheeked girl, from the hall into the long stone passage which led to Margaret's room in the tower, she might have recognised her bearings; but as it was, she was taken in and out of so many odd little rooms, all leading one out of the other, that it was not until a door was thrown open, and she passed through it and heard it close behind her, that she realised where she was.

She was a miserable coward at heart. Her eyes fell on the great iron ring sunk in the stone slab in the middle of the floor, and a shudder ran through her body. That terrible hole lay almost immediately beneath her feet,

and she remembered the ghastly tales she had heard recited as she stood by the edge of it.

She shrank back, and looked round for the door. Not a sign of an entrance or exit was visible. One piece of panelling appeared to be exactly the same as the other. The windows were tightly shut, and when she tried to open one, it felt as though it were nailed to its socket.

A nameless terror crept slowly over her. She sank down helplessly on a chair. Although the atmosphere in the room was hot and heavy, her teeth chattered, and she shivered as if she were sitting in a vault.

CHAPTER XXI

DENOUNCED

IN some ways Mrs. Maynard was a very clever woman, and in others she was a very stupid one.

As she sat in that vault-room, waiting for she knew not what, she told herself over and over again in impotent fear and anger, that she had been a fool to make use of such a silly expedient as to hide these letters in the handle of her parasol.

Even although it was a hidden opening, the secret ran the risk of being discovered at any moment.

A parasol might be stolen, mislaid, or lost very easily: an inquisitive person examining the serpent's head too closely might loosen the spring. It was not a thing she could carry about her person night and day, and the value

of the jewelled handle was its greatest source of danger.

Ever since she had discovered her loss she had been furious with herself for her stupidity in not having taken into account all these contingencies. One day she had surprised her maid in the act of reading her letters, and she had thought herself very clever in thinking of this plan by which she could hide her private affairs from inquisitive eyes.

What the letters contained it is not necessary to explain, but their loss was a matter of vital interest, to their owner.

Had the secret of the parasol been discovered she wondered, and was this going to be a case of blackmail? She was so accustomed to her own crooked views of human nature, that she attributed crooked ways to other people. It was probable that the parasol was hidden somewhere in the room. If only she could gain possession of it before she was interrupted, she might be able to make her own terms, she thought.

She rose from her chair, and, shrinking

away from that iron ring in the middle of the floor, which so terrified her, she crept cautiously round by the walls. There were cupboards evidently behind the panelling, for when she looked closely she saw the marks of keyholes pierced in the woodwork, and with a startled exclamation of joy she saw that a bunch of keys had been left lying on the table.

In a second her hand had closed over them. She had already lifted them when her eyes fell upon a framed photograph standing on the table exactly in front of her. It was the photograph of Margaret's brother, David Robertson. No attempt had been made by the artist to soften down the harsh effects of black and white. It was painfully, and distinctly life-like.

The bunch of keys fell from her nerveless fingers with a clinking rattle on the stone flags, and at the same moment a door opened and Margaret came into the room.

Mrs. Maynard saw the open door, and the long passage beyond it which led to freedom.

If her body would only answer her will and allow her to make a rush past that tall menacing figure! But it would not. She knew that she was trapped in some horrible net from which she could not escape. She stood chattering and shivering like some half-witted creature by the side of the table, until she saw the door close and the tall figure advancing slowly towards her.

Margaret saw the bunch of keys and the photograph, and guessed what had happened. She had purposely left her visitor for some time by herself. The associations connected with the Death Tower were not cheerful, and not likely to soothe the nerves of a person suffering from a bad conscience.

In appearance, Margaret resembled her brother very strongly, and, as she stood looking down at the cowering woman, she saw Mrs. Maynard's eyes go from her face to that of the photograph, and then back again, in undisguised terror and apprehension.

Margaret had no intention of beating about the bush. She had brought this woman to

the house for a purpose, and she opened the conversation at once. She pointed to the photograph.

"I ken a' aboot ye," she said quietly. "Thon's my brither. He had chairge o' yir husband, who couldna' take care o' himsel', for five years."

Mrs. Maynard swayed a little from side to side and held on more tightly to the table. The eyes of this tall, stern woman seemed to pierce right through her.

"Yir husband's been deid for a twelve-month," continued the quiet voice. "My brither pit him in his coffin, and saw the sod stampit ower his grave. Ye paid for the berryin' yersel', sae ye ken it 's true."

Mrs. Maynard struggled to speak, and the words came out hoarsely.

"I paid everything. Wages—all expenses, everything!"

Margaret looked her up and down with profound contempt.

"Ay, ye paid at the laist, because ye kent ye were free o' yir burden. But there was

mony a day afore that when Davie had tae tak' his ain tae keep yir man frae want."

Margaret had so far spoken in her usual low even tones. Suddenly the glow of anger flamed up in her grey eyes. Her voice vibrated with an intensity of passion which was all the more terrifying because of the latent force which held it in check.

"Ye 're fause," she denounced. "A black-haired, evil wuman, wha seeks tae live by the ruin o' ithers. Ye would pairt husband and wife. Ye would tak awa' the love o' a faither fra' his bairn. There 's nae evil or wickedness ye would na' dae tae serve yir ain plesure. I said the noo I kent a' aboot ye, I 'll prove ma wurds. Wha has keepit disgrace frae yir doors a' these years? Wha has stood atween you an' a drunken madman? I ken wha it was. It 's no mony days since he left this hoos, an' I 'll no sit by and see his wife and bairn wrainged.

"Ye 've ta'en his siller, an' what hae ye gien him in return for a' that he 's done for ye? Ye 've chaited him. Yir man's deid, an'

ye 've never let on that he 's deid. Ye 've ta'en the siller for his keep an' he's lyin' in the kirkyard."

She stopped speaking, and the terrified woman in front of her looked round in helpless despair.

Margaret held up her hand.

"Ye 're condemned oot o' yir ain mooth," she said slowly. "I heard ye tellin' yir lees when ye was sittin' outside my window there."

Mrs. Maynard covered her face with her hands. Was there anything this terrible woman did not know? It was useless to fight against such an overwhelming weight of evidence.

"What do you want?" she stammered. "Is it money? Have you brought me here to try and frighten me into giving you money?"

"Money!" Margaret's eyes flashed. "No, it's no money. Ye can richt the wraing. Send wurd tae him wha 's hairt ye 've well-nigh broke, an' tell him hoo ye 've leed tae him a' this past year."

Mrs. Maynard dropped her hands from before her face.

"I dare not. I am afraid to tell him," she cried.

Margaret took a step nearer. For the first time there was the suspicion of a threat in her voice.

"Maybe ye 'll get mair maircy frae him than frae ithers I could name," she said significantly.

"How can I tell him—he is not here? You must give me time! I must find some means of telling him!" exclaimed Mrs. Maynard, gaining a faint shadow of hope at the prospect of delay.

If she could only tell Jim in her own way, she might be able to make him see the circumstances from her point of view.

Margaret walked over to the old writing-desk, and, opening it, placed pen and paper in readiness, and drew a chair up to the table on which it was standing.

"Ye 'll write till him afore ye leave this room," she said.

The passion had died out of her voice. She was her own quiet, grave self again.

Mrs. Maynard dragged herself across the floor, and sat down before the desk. Fate was inexorable, there was no help for it but to obey.

She took up the pen and began to write, at first slowly, then with feverish anxiety. She was a fluent writer at any time, and now she strained every nerve to express herself in terms which would appeal to the man upon whose mercy she was staking her last chance.

When she had finished, she folded the closely written sheets, and was about to thrust them into an envelope.

Margaret had been watching her in the background. Without speaking she held out her hand.

Mrs. Maynard drew herself up, and showed a certain amount of courage.

"You have no right to see this letter," she said. "It is only to be read by the one who understands all the circumstances. I have

given a full explanation, you have my word for it."

Margaret shook her head slowly.

"I canna' trust ye. Yir wurd's no enough," and with her strong firm hand she took the letter from between Mrs. Maynard's trembling fingers, and, unfolding the two sheets of paper, read them. It was not difficult, as the handwriting was clear and distinct.

Without a muscle of her face changing, she deliberately tore the letter into small pieces. There was a distinct ring of command now in her voice, as laying a fresh sheet of paper on the board of the writing-desk, she said:

"Ye canna' waste time. Tell him yir man's deid an' hoo lang he's been deid. That ye never let on, but keepit his siller an' spent it for yir ain pleasure. If ye daur pray for maircy, it's for him tae say—no me."

With an obedience which she had never thought to tender to any human being, Mrs. Maynard wrote the second letter with Margaret's compelling presence standing erect behind her chair. It was only a few disjointed

sentences, for before she had covered half a sheet of paper, Margaret placed an envelope in front of her, and from the inside of her work-basket she unpinned a strip of paper and laid it beside the envelope. On it was written the address which Jim had given her the morning he left Pittvie.

Mrs. Maynard had relinquished all thought of resistance. To escape from the house was the one idea uppermost in her mind. She did not care what depths of humiliation she was dragged through, if only she could regain her liberty. A hasty glance at the strip of paper was sufficient to tell her who had written the words, and she knew the address well. She directed the envelope, and, throwing down the pen, rose to her feet. Instinct told her that it would be useless to suggest that she should post the letter herself; she would never be allowed to take it out of the room.

“Let me go,” she said, looking round wildly. “Where is the door? Open it for me at once.”

But Margaret was not to be hurried. There was time enough yet for what remained to be done. She locked the letter into the writing-case.

“Ye ’ve forgot what ye cam’ tae seek,” she said, and, picking up the bunch of keys from the floor where it had lain unnoticed, she opened one of the cupboards in the wall and took out the parasol.

The light caught the jewelled head of the serpent, and glistened on the gold of its twisted body.

“It canna’ keep a trust—it’s fause,” she remarked quietly, as she put it into the hands of its owner.

She crossed the room, and drawing down a small knob in the panelling, which was painted the same colour as the woodwork and was hardly noticeable to any one who did not understand its meaning, the door opened easily.

This time there was no object in confusing Mrs. Maynard by leading her through the intricate windings of the old house.

Margaret preceded her along the stone passage which led into the hall, and passed through the porch and down the pathway to the door in the garden wall. Outside it the carriage was waiting which had brought Mrs. Maynard to Pittivie.

Margaret stood in the open doorway, and watched the carriage disappear through the heavy iron gates which opened out on to the high road. Then she slowly retraced her steps.

Her work had been done more successfully than she had hoped, and no one knew of what had taken place. That was what she had aimed at from the first to last. It must never be known what share she had taken in wringing that confession from Mrs. Maynard. What use would be made of it, and what punishment would be meted out to the guilty woman was no affair of hers; but she had a firm faith in the Almighty's power of vengeance.

She would have liked to post the letter there and then, and rid her mind of the last responsibility, but she decided to wait until the

evening, and, when all was quiet, she would do as she had done before, and slip out under cover of darkness, and post it herself.

She fetched her knitting from her own room, and went out to the bench which was propped against the wall beside her window. She liked to sit there and watch the sea, and listen to the cries of the wild birds and the beat of the waves breaking against the rocks. In the distance she could hear the children's voices, and the sounds of merry-making coming from the field down by the shore. She sat and knitted placidly, and a feeling of great rest and contentment settled on her spirit.

CHAPTER XXII

NANNY WATCHES THE YACHT

NANNY often wondered in after years how she managed to exist through that week of waiting, and to keep up her courage, outwardly, before those around her.

After the first evening following Mrs. Maynard's visit, Lulu ceased to worry over the girl's looks. The expression of dazed stupor left her face, and if she was restless and absent-minded at times, it was only what was to be expected; and although Lulu did not wish to part with Nanny and the child, she began to long for the time when Jim would return and take his belongings into his own keeping, for she saw, that whatever was the strain under which Nanny was labouring, it was telling on her severely.

Perhaps that hour of bitter weeping, of

which Margaret alone knew the agony, had eased Nanny's heart. She had naturally a high spirit, and both her pride and her love helped her. There were times when the black cloud closed in upon her so darkly that she had to go away by herself, and fight the demons of jealousy and doubt which tortured her; but out of each fight she emerged with one determination fixed more and more firmly in her mind. She would judge her husband on no condemnation but his own. If what he had to tell her was unforgivable, then all would have to be at an end between them. But she would hear what he had to say from his own lips, and he would tell her the truth whatever it was. He would not deceive her, even for the sake of sparing her unhappiness.

The days slipped past uneventfully. Jim had not written to her, and she had not expected that he would, but Sir Andrew had received a letter, and she knew from it that he was in London.

The hours crept slowly on, and it came to the last day but one. After lunch, when

every one as a rule scattered to follow their own interests, she picked up a book, and passing through the garden, went out on to the cliffs, by the gate which Sandy was accustomed to use when he brought his boat round to the landing-stage at the foot of the rocks.

She made her way to a favourite nook where she often sat—a patch of wild grass grew in a cleft between two big boulders, and there was a shelving bank to lean her back against.

It was like a sea-bird's nest. The water encircled her on almost every side. She was so high up, that, stretching away to the distant horizon, the broad line of the blue Firth lay like a carpet beneath her feet. She watched the fishing boats; the steamers as they passed within sight; the white sails of vessels coming and going; there was a restfulness and peace in the wide expanse of sea and sky.

She was not in the humour for reading and did not even open her book. She had brought it with her as an excuse for solitude. She

could not keep her mind for long from dwelling on the thought of what was going to happen the next day. A great crisis was hanging over her; its coming possessed her with one idea and one hope.

At some distance from where she was sitting a young fisher-lad was lying full length on the short turf which crowned the heights of the cliff. His head was hanging over the edge of the rock and he was craning his neck to its utmost to enable him to see some object below him.

She knew what was his purpose, and at any other time would have been interested in his movements, but only a vague curiosity stirred her. She had seen the sea-birds being caught before. They nested along the face of the cliff, but it was too precipitous to be climbed by even the nimblest foot or the steadiest head, and the fisher-folk had their own methods of catching the birds.

The lad had evidently located the particular spot he was in search of, and had taken its bearings from his boat in passing. Nanny

saw him uncoil a length of line baited with a piece of fish on the end of a sharp hook. The line was lowered slowly down to a depth of about twenty feet, until it dangled over a narrow ledge of rock on which a row of young guillemots were squatting in the sunshine.

It was some minutes before he secured his prey. At last an unwary bird swallowed the bait. The sharp hook did its work, and beating its wings and struggling vainly the bird was drawn to the top and grasped in the boy's hand. Nanny knew what would happen to it. Its fate would not be an unhappy one, but its wild freedom was gone. Its wings would be clipped, and it would be kept in some old woman's garden to act as scavenger. Its voracious appetite would protect her potato patch from being devoured by slugs and insects. The village people had primitive but effective ways of their own for doing their work.

The lad coiled up his line and went off with his prize, but his presence on the cliff had caused a commotion amongst the birds, which

did not subside for some little while. They swooped and swirled in white flocks, about the place where Nanny was sitting, the sunlight glancing on their wings and turning them to silver. Sometimes they came quite near her, uttering their harsh, piercing cries—sometimes they circled far out over the water and became mere white specks against the blue.

The sultry weather had exploded in a thunder-storm the night before, and the atmosphere was peculiarly clear and transparent. Nanny found herself watching one particular white speck which did not soar and circle as did the others. It was very small at first, but it grew steadily larger, and after gazing at it intently for some minutes, she knew that it was not a sea-bird, but a vessel of some sort with a white hull.

It was still a long distance off, and she could not see its lines distinctly. If it followed the ordinary track of steamers, it would pass too far out to be recognisable by the naked eye.

She sprang to her feet, and the book rolled

to the edge of the cliff, and fell with a splash into the water below, but she took no notice. She ran back up the steep bank, through the gateway into the ruins, and across the garden into the porch.

Sir Andrew's telescope hung in a leather case just inside the door, and she took it down from its stand and hurried back to her nest on the cliff-side. Even during the few minutes whilst she had been absent, she could see that the white object had changed in form. It had lengthened out and the hull was visible from stem to stern.

Nanny propped the telescope against a ledge of rock, and adjusted the sighting. Her fingers were trembling so much that she could hardly make them do what she wanted, and when she tried to focus the distance, nothing but a blurred mass of moving water rocked before her eyes. Gradually the mist cleared. She had got the sighting right, and in another second the white bows ought to cross the round disc of blue on which her gaze was concentrated.

She held her breath as the sharp nose of the bowsprit shot into view, and the sunlight struck on the golden wings which spread fan-like from the body of the figure-head. There were the graceful lines of the fore-deck: the two cream-coloured funnels tipped with bands of black: the windows of the deck cabins: the flutter of the Union Jack as the white stern glided out of the range of vision.

It was the *Katinata!* She seemed so near that Nanny felt that if she cried out, her voice must be heard by those on board. She could not see any figures distinctly, for the yacht had been built for heavy seas, and her bulwarks were unusually high, and she was still a long way out.

She took her eyes away from the telescope. She could judge better what the *Katinata* was going to do without its help. She was evidently not coming in nearer land: she was steering a straight course up the Firth. At the speed she was making she would be safely anchored off Leith docks in a few hours' time.

What did it mean? Nanny wondered; and

was Jim on board? He would know his bearings; he would know that he must pass Pittivie, and the Castle Rock was a landmark for miles along that flat coast, which could not fail to be seen. What was his object in passing on, if he were to keep his promise to be at Pittivie the next day?

Her brain was in a whirl of excitement, and then she remembered Captain Craggs's proverbial caution. He would not trust any anchorage, unless he was quite sure of its safety. An impatient sigh escaped her. She re-adjusted the position of the telescope, and directed it again on the yacht.

The *Katinata* was steaming from her rapidly. Her bows were turning gradually away, until before long it was only the white stern which presented itself to her strained sight. Then that also became faint and indistinct. It dwindled into a tiny speck, and was lost sight of as the western sun gathered it up into a shimmer of dazzling light.

CHAPTER XXIII

WHAT MADE JIM MISS HIS TRAIN

JIM was not on board the *Katinata* when she passed up the Firth.

Under ordinary circumstances he might have taken the cruise for the mere pleasure of being on the sea instead of on land, but he had a great deal to do before he could return to Pittiviè, and he had barely the inside of a week to do it in.

The days had seemed to his impatience to pass slowly enough, but it was an easier time of waiting for him than it was for Nanny. The one who goes out into the world finds distraction at every turn to keep his mind from dwelling too closely on self; it is the one who is left behind, amidst the familiar associations which remind but do not distract, who feels the loneliness of a separation most keenly.

In London Jim found every minute of his time occupied. He had been out of England for so long and he had not been in a state of mind during his absence to pay much attention to home affairs, and consequently many things required his presence. He was a rich man, and had landed interests in the country as well as personal property. If all went well, and he was full of hope that now that he was to be released from his false position all would be well, his idea was to take Nanny away from associations which could not fail to remind her of past unhappiness, and he wished to make all arrangements for that to be possible, before he returned to Pittivie.

She loved a wandering life as much as he did. They would explore fresh countries, and revisit old scenes, and live over again the good times which they had spent together during those two years which had followed their marriage.

He made his plans accordingly. He sent instructions to Captain Craggs regarding the yacht, and when and where it was to meet

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him, and waded through piles of correspondence, and business with his lawyer.

One task he set himself to do which he disliked extremely. He settled, provisionally, for the allowance to be paid for Mr. Maynard. If Nanny agreed to the arrangement, it would simplify matters to have everything planned beforehand, and then the subject need never be referred to again. It would be purely a business transaction, and would require no personal interference on his side.

On the morning of the day he intended to travel north, he found to his annoyance, that he would be obliged to go down to his own place in the country for the day. The affair concerned some matter which it would be easy to settle by word of mouth, but difficult to explain in writing.

After the first sensation of annoyance had passed off, he began to think that it would be rather a good way of spending the day, and there was nothing particular left for him to do in town. It was only a matter of two or three hours in the train, and he would

have the freshness of the country in exchange for the heat and noise of London. He could be back in plenty of time to dine, and catch the night mail to the north at the hour that he had originally intended to start.

The peace of the country appealed to him, and he was in the mood to appreciate it. As he watched scene after scene glide past the carriage window his spirits rose at the thought that the week of waiting was almost over. To-morrow, he devoutly hoped would see the last cloud roll away between himself and those he loved. He was sure Nanny would take him back to her heart, and forgive him the wrong he had done her. Her generous nature would understand the burden which had been laid upon him. He believed she would have forgiven him and taken him back that evening in the old garden at Pittivie, when he had told her as much as he could of the truth. She had not sent him away, she had made it very hard for him to go; but he had gone, and he was glad now that he had gone. When he met her to-morrow, there would no longer be

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any need to keep his love in check. His mind was full of thoughts of what he would do to try and make amends to her for all that she had suffered.

It did not take him long to transact his business, and after it was over, it interested him to wander about the place.

There was only a caretaker and his wife in charge, so that he could go where he liked without interference. Things were rather going to bits, he concluded. He had not lived in his old home since his father's death, and the house had stood empty for some years. When he and Nanny grew tired of travelling they would come and live there, and Nanny would have to settle down into a sedate matron. He smiled to himself at the idea. Nanny would never be different to what she was, and he did not wish her to be different.

There were a couple of Shetland ponies cropping the grass just inside the park fence and he leant over the railing and looked at them critically. The one nearest him was

not much bigger than a Newfoundland dog. He jumped the fence like a schoolboy, and went up to the little creature, which was evidently accustomed to being handled, and showed no fear of him.

He felt it all over and looked at its mouth. Just the kind of beast for a small child to ride as soon as it could hold a rein in its hand.

The caretaker's wife gave him tea before he started on his return journey to the station. As she had no dainties to offer, she had boiled an egg for him and there was home-made bread.

It was delightfully primitive, and reminded him of the many odd meals he and Nanny had shared together in their travels. He wished she were sitting beside him at that moment.

He allowed himself plenty of time at the station to catch his train. It was a small wayside place, and he would have to travel so far on the local line in order to pick up the London connection at the nearest junction.

The train lumbered into the station twenty

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minutes late, and lumbered out again almost as quickly as he could have walked. He began to grow impatient as they stopped at every station, and after passing the third, and going on for a mile or two and then coming to a standstill, he inwardly vowed that if ever he came to live on his ancestral acres, he would agitate for an improved system of railway communication.

When he was told what had caused the stoppage, impatience turned to dismay. A goods train had broken down and the line was blocked. There was no staff of men at hand to help in the emergency; it would be a matter of an hour or two before the way could be cleared to let the passenger train through.

There was no good in being angry. Jim took off his coat and lent a helping hand to clear away the broken truck. He was not much use perhaps, as his fingers had not yet recovered from the effects of his accident, but his example counted for something, and a few of the other passengers followed his lead. Their exertions, nevertheless, did not save

them from missing the connection at the junction. There was a long dreary wait for a slow train, and Jim arrived in London just five minutes too late to catch the last express north.

He drove to his club, and asking for a timetable, tried to work out his journey for the next day. By some means or other he was determined to reach Pittivie by the following night. He found that by leaving London in the morning he could be in the northern capital about six o'clock, but could not continue his journey to Pittivie till very late. If the London train was not up to time he might not be able to get on at all.

There was the yacht to fall back upon. If Captain Craggs had been able to follow out his instructions, she ought by now to be snugly anchored off Leith. Jim had told Captain Craggs to wire of his safe arrival, and when he asked if there were any letters or telegrams he was brought a pile of letters and a telegram lay on the top.

It was all right.

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The *Katinata* had made her voyage up to time. His way was now clear before him. He would send a wire to the yacht in the morning: he would go direct from the train down to the docks, and would find steam up, and every thing ready to start at a moment's notice for Pittivie. He might arrive late, but anyhow he would be able to keep his word to be with Nanny on the day he had promised.

He pushed the time-table away from him, and picking up his letters, sat down in an arm-chair to read them. The handwriting on the first envelope he opened was uncomfortably familiar, and a quick look of alarm came into his face as he noticed that the postmark was that of Pittivie.

CHAPTER XXIV

TWO RUNAWAYS ON AN EXCURSION STEAMER

NANNY did not fall asleep the night before Jim was to arrive at Pittivie, for long, and she woke with the first faint glimmer of dawn as the birds began to twitter in the garden below her window.

The sight of the *Katinata* steaming up the Firth had filled her mind with all manner of possibilities.

Jim might be at Pittivie by mid-day, and even if he did not come by the first train in the morning, he would still arrive in time for dinner.

The early hours of the day were spent in a state of feverish expectancy, and she kept out of the way of the household as much as she could, so that her anxiety might not be observed.

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Lunch-time came and went, and still there was no sign of Jim and no message.

Her fever of expectancy turned to a kind of panic. All of a sudden she felt that she was afraid to meet him. It was an intangible fear, which she could neither reason out, nor overcome. Every moment was bringing him nearer to her. She did not doubt that he would keep his word and come, and this absurd feeling of panic, this agony of self-consciousness, was making her long to stop time, and gain a reprieve.

She had gone out into the garden and was leaning over the low wall by the edge of the cliff. Down below, she saw that the *Bonny Meg* was moored alongside of the steps cut in the rock, and Sandy was toiling up the bank with his creel on his shoulder.

He was earlier than usual in delivering his fish, but he had some business of his own to transact that afternoon and had only stayed out long enough to catch what was required for the castle use.

An idea occurred to Nanny on the impulse

of the moment. Everything she did that day, she reflected afterwards, was done on the impulse of the moment.

She was waiting for Sandy when he reached the gate leading into the ruins, and asked him if he would take her out in his boat.

Sandy looked perplexed.

He never liked to refuse the gentry anything. It was an honour to do them service; but he hesitatingly explained that he had intended to make an expedition that afternoon further up the coast to one of the small fishing towns which was of more importance than Pittivie. It owned a net factory, and he was going to buy a new fishing net, which was a great event in his simple life.

“But you can take me all the same,” said Nanny, quickly. “Whilst you are buying your net, you can leave me in the boat. I am going to get ready, and I am going to take the baby with me.” And not waiting to hear whether he agreed to her proposal or not, she ran back into the house.

The baby was awake, and she dressed it

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hurriedly. Neither Lulu nor Sir Andrew were to be seen anywhere, but she left a message to say where she had gone, and remembered to put her purse in her pocket, because she always gave Sandy something when he took her out for a sail. As she passed through the hall she caught up a plaid and threw it over her arm. It was a warm day, but it might be chilly for the child on the water.

Sandy was ready for her, and the *Bonny Meg* was soon under way. The breeze favoured them, and Nanny was disappointed to find how quickly they slipped through the water. The expedition would not last nearly so long as she had hoped. It seemed only a few minutes from the time they had left the Castle Cliff, to the time when Sandy steered into the harbour of the fishing town where he had come to buy his net.

Nanny did not object to being left alone.

"I shall be all right here," she said, after he had secured the boat to the side of the quay. "You can stay as long as you like."

She leant back in the seat and watched

what was going on around her. She knew the fisher-folk and their ways, and had an instinctive love for anything that wore a blue jersey and smelt of the sea.

A harbour was always interesting. Close by, a Norwegian barque was unloading wood. Its hull was painted bright green, and side by side with it was a dirty little coal-tramp sending up buckets of coal from its hold. A couple of trawlers were being provisioned to start on the night's fishing, and to her surprise, a passenger steamer with a red funnel, was blowing off steam in the other side of the cobbled causeway near where the *Bonny Meg* was moored.

"What is that steamer doing here?" she asked of a man who was lounging against the sea-wall.

"She's ane o' they pleasure trips," he answered.

"Where does she go?" asked Nanny.

The man pointed up the Firth.

"She ca's at mair nor ain place," he replied vaguely.

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“But she comes back here?”

“Ay, she comes back,” he answered. “The folk mun cam back, ye ken.”

Nanny asked him to steady the boat whilst she stepped out of it, for she held the child in her arms. The moment her feet were safely on the stone steps she ran up them eagerly, and was across the quay and on board the steamer with the red funnel before she had quite realised what she was doing.

An impulse had again seized her, and she obeyed it blindly.

She was just in time, for the mooring ropes were thrown off a minute later and the steamer began to move. She bent over the side and beckoned to the man from whom she had gained her information. He was sure to know Sandy MacNab, because every one knew every one else in that part of the world.

She threw him a shilling.

“Take care of the boat,” she called out, “and tell Sandy that I ’m coming back soon.”

Nanny had never been on an excursion steamer in her life. Her experience of the sea

was connected with the yacht, and the comfort and luxury of the *Katinata* approached pretty nearly to perfection. Also, she had not taken any means to verify the statement of the lounge on the quay as to where the steamer was really going. It was not until they had called at several places to pick up passengers, and a dense mass of humanity was beginning to crowd the decks with a more or less hilarious crowd of holiday-makers, that she ventured to ask when they were going to begin their return journey.

"We don't stop now until we get to Leith," said the official, who was making the round of the passengers and clipping their tickets.

He was much too busy to take any notice of Nanny's gasp of consternation and hurried questions. Some rough-looking men, who were not particularly sober, had come on board at the last place where they had stopped and were inclined to give trouble. They required all his attention.

Nanny's consternation turned to anger, and anger gave way to fright as the crowd

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pressed more and more closely round where she was sitting. The people were packed so tightly together that she could not see what was going on, and could hardly breathe.

A fat woman, with a kindly red face, was wedged in on one side of her, and a man with a black bottle bulging out of his pocket was leaning against her on the other.

He leered at her, and offered her the black bottle, and she recoiled in horror against the fat woman, who tried to shelter her as well as space would allow.

"It's a sair press o' folk," said the woman, wiping her hot forehead. "I'm no' for they plesure trips mysel', but ma lassie thocht it wud be a fine outin'. She's lyin' doon the stair that seek, she canna' lift her heid."

Nanny's fears deepened as the black bottles began to circulate and the crowd grew noisier. They hemmed her in more tightly than before, and the atmosphere was stifling.

The baby fortunately had dropped asleep and she prayed fervently that it would not wake until they reached the land. Would

the journey never end? she wondered. Nothing would persuade her to return the way she had come. Once on shore again, she did not know what she intended to do, but she would surely find some one who could direct her. If it was too late to get back to Pittivie by train, she must stay the night somewhere, and go on the next morning.

She wondered if she had enough money with her? She would have liked to look in her purse to make sure, but she was afraid to take her arm away from the baby in case the movement might waken it.

Surely they must be nearing some big port now, she thought, because she could hear the shrill blasts of steam whistles, and the occasional hoot of a horn. Then there was the sensation of slowing down to half-speed; the engines were reversed, and she heard the screw churning the water. A soft bumping sound, and a slight tremor ran through the vessel from stem to stern as she drew in slowly against the side of the pier.

Nanny would have been wiser to have

waited until the rush to cross the gangway was over, but she allowed herself to be borne along with the crowd. Rain had commenced to fall heavily, and she had wrapped the plaid over the child, almost suffocating it in her efforts to keep it from being hustled out of her arms.

It began to struggle and whimper, and she half lost her balance stepping from the gangway on to the slippery stones of the pier.

The crowd was almost as dense there as on the deck of the steamer. Like a flock of bewildered sheep, the people did not seem to know which way they wanted to go, and swayed perilously near the edge of the wooden platform.

Looking down at the water, she saw something which made her cry out aloud in the excess of her joy and relief.

One of the *Katinata's* boats was lying close in under the shelter of the pier. A man in the bows was holding on with a boat-hook, and gradually guiding it towards a landing-

stage on a level with the water. He had his back to her, and she could not attract his attention. She saw the flutter of the black ribbons which hung down from the side of his cap, and once, when he half-turned, she caught a glimpse of the last three letters of the yacht's name on the breast of his jersey.

It was maddening! Her voice sounded faint even to her own ears. She would never make him hear, and she could not fight her way towards him through the surging mass of people.

Someone lurched against her, and she looked over her shoulder to see that it was the man with the black bottle who had frightened her on the steamer.

He was holding on to a wooden post and talking to it.

"If I let go, I 'll fa' doon, an' if I hud on, I 'll miss ma train," he was repeating with maudlin solemnity.

Suddenly the crowd parted for a moment, as though some one were trying to force their way through it. Nanny saw two of the

Two Runaways on a Steamer 289

Katinata's crew, each with a portmanteau across his shoulders, and a tall man in grey clothes walking behind. Then the surging mass of human beings closed in about her once more.

She made a desperate effort, and called out something, but she knew that it was not heard.

Her cry attracted the attention of the drunken man. He stretched out a hand and caught hold of the plaid which was wrapped over the baby. It came away in his grasp, and the little white sunbonnet came with it.

A child's cry of fear ran out shrilly, and was repeated again and again. The man still kept his hold of the plaid, and the rank smell of raw spirits fanned Nanny's cheek, and she felt a nauseating sense of deadly sickness, draining all the strength out of her limbs.

As she was faintly wondering if she could possibly stand up for one minute longer, she saw the man in the grey clothes elbowing the crowd from right to left of him, as though they had been so many flies. She had a confused

idea of seeing the drunken man caught by his collar and crumpled up into a heap at her feet. She felt that the weight she held in her arms was slipping from her, and then—she remembered nothing more.

CHAPTER XXV

I WANT YOU TO FORGIVE YOURSELF

NANNY had never fainted in her life. The nearest approach to it had been when she saw Jim carried through the gate at Pittivie on the day of his accident.

When she came to herself, she thought at first that she had awakened out of her sleep and had been dreaming a bad dream.

She was lying down, and everything about her was very quiet. She lay still, with her eyes open, and gradually it dawned upon her that her surroundings were familiar, but that she was not in her own room at Pittivie.

In her dream she had been very wet and uncomfortable. Her hands, when she looked down at them, rested on something soft and white which wrapped her from head to foot; there was a familiarity about the feeling of

it, and memory rushed back with a bound. She was in her own cabin on the *Katinata*, and this was her own dressing-gown.

She started and sat upright, to find herself pulled gently back against the cushions of her couch and Jim's voice saying in her ear, "Lie still, Nanny. You 're all right. I'm here."

She struggled to sit up again, and when she found that she was too tightly held to get her own way, she turned her head back until she could see his face.

He looked rather white and anxious. It had seemed to him that she had taken an unconscionably long time to come to her senses. He was in complete ignorance as to what had happened before the child's cry had brought him on the scene on the pier. He had only been in time to throw off the man's hold. As Nanny had lain white and still in his arms, he had been possessed with a horrible dread that she had been hit or hurt in some way to cause her to go off in such a dead faint.

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A look of alarm sprang into her eyes. Nanny never did things by halves. She had been insensible the minute before, she was now vividly conscious and all her senses on the alert.

“Why do you look like that?” she demanded. “Is there anything the matter? Did I let baby fall?” and the look of alarm in her eyes deepened.

Jim gave a sigh of relief. There could not be much the matter with her when she was so like her own eager self again.

“The child’s all right,” he said, and he smoothed back the hair which was tumbling over her forehead.

Nanny still resisted.

“Where is she?” she asked, looking anxiously round the cabin. “Tell me, Jim. Let me go to her. Don’t hold me so tight.”

His arms closed all the more firmly around her.

“What a little wild thing you are, Nanny,” he said tenderly. “I won’t let you go. You can’t get away from me. The child’s per-

factly right, and as safe as possible. She 's with her nurse," he added.

"Nurse!" repeated Nanny. "What do you mean? Who 's her nurse?"

Jim smiled. "You 'd never guess; so I may as well tell you. Mrs. Craggs."

"Mrs. Craggs? What is she doing here?"

"I allowed old Craggs to bring his good lady with him on the trip north," said Jim. "He 's been away, you see, for more than a year, and it was rather rough luck ordering him off again at such short notice. She had n't left when we got you on board. I bundled the child into her arms when I carried you down here—now are you satisfied?"

"No," said Nanny quickly. "The poor little darling will be starving. We were such hours and hours on that dreadful steamer, and it must be ages past her supper-time. Will Mrs. Craggs know what to give her?"

"If you promise to lie quite still, and not move until I come back, I 'll go and see," he said.

"I promise," she answered, and leant back

with a tired look on her face. "I do feel rather shaky."

"I believe you 're done up for want of food, too," said Jim. "When did you have anything last?"

Nanny admitted that she had eaten hardly any lunch, and nothing since.

"And it 's now getting on for eight o'clock? I 'm not going to allow you to talk, or ask questions, or do anything else, until you've had some dinner. I 'll order it to be brought in here and then you won't have to move."

He crossed to the door and touched an electric bell. When the steward came, she heard him give some orders and the man's answer.

"In ten minutes? Yes, sir. And the champagne? We have ice on board, sir."

Then Jim went out and closed the door quietly behind him.

Nanny was content. It was joy to be able to lie still and know that he was near. The old feeling of comfort and dependence on him crept back to her heart. The remembrance

of the loneliness and weight of responsibility, and the unshared griefs of the past year, faded from her. Through her half-closed eyes she took in all the familiar details of her surroundings. There was the element of home in every touch. Her favourite books! The well-known pictures! The soft colouring of the furniture! Even the flowers scattered about were her favourite flowers—nothing seemed changed. The hands of time must surely have stood still. It could not possibly be more than a year since she had left it all?

She shut her eyes tightly for a minute to hide it out, so that when she looked again she might be quite sure that it was not all a fancy of her brain. She opened them to find that Jim was bending over her. He had come in so quietly through the door leading into his own cabin that she had not heard him.

He drew a chair close up to her couch and sat down.

“Well?” she asked. “What are they doing with baby?”

The anxious expression had left his face.

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"She's settled in the best state cabin," he said, "and every man jack of them from old Craggs downwards, has been allowed to look at her through the door. She's sitting there like a little queen, and looks as if she'd been accustomed to the show all her life."

Nanny laughed softly.

"Was n't she very hungry?" she asked.

"I don't know what she's got in her mouth," said Jim, gravely. "But she's pulling at it in such a desperate hurry that Mrs. Craggs has to hold on to the other end to keep her from swallowing it. They sent ashore for all sorts of odd things."

He bent over her.

"Nanny," he said, "what were you doing in that awful rabble? How did you know where I was? What put it into your head to come and meet me?"

The colour sprang into Nanny's cheeks. When she was a little frightened her eyes grew very bright and star-like, but she did not turn them away from him.

"I was n't coming to meet you—I was run-

ning away from you," she faltered; and out tumbled her confession of the day's adventure, very quickly and rather incoherently.

"And you ran right into my arms," said Jim. "My dear, I think the only safe thing for me to do is to keep you afloat. It was just a chance my finding you. My train was late. If I'd been up to time I'd have missed you."

"Then you were not on board the *Katinata* when she passed up yesterday!" said Nanny, eagerly. "I watched her through the telescope."

"Bless you, no!" he exclaimed in surprise. "You don't suppose I'd have stayed here for a whole day doing nothing? I only left town this morning, and wired to have steam up on the yacht to take me on to Pittivie."

His hand went to the pocket of his coat and a dark look came into his eyes. A letter lay there which had raised in him a storm of anger which was all the more fierce because he had been obliged to keep it in check.

And he must still keep it in check. He

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would not have Nanny distressed with any trying scene yet awhile. She looked white and shaken; it was not the time to speak.

A tap came at the door and the steward entered to prepare for dinner.

The table was arranged close to Nanny's couch. An electric lamp softly shaded, threw the light on the white cloth and silver, and there was a bowl of Nanny's favourite *La France* roses on the table. Jim's memory was very good, and his instructions had been carried out to the letter.

The champagne sparkled, and sent up its little golden bubbles in the quaint-shaped Venetian glasses which she remembered so well. Nanny's spirits rose as spontaneously as the bubbles in her glass. She wanted to live for the pure happiness of the present moment. A fear was hanging over her that the time would come all too soon, when Jim would speak of things which must be said, but of which she was afraid to hear. He was very quiet, and grew quieter as the meal drew to a close.

After the table had been cleared, and the man had disappeared for the last time, he took her hand in his and said abruptly:

“The week has come and gone at last. And now—we must have it all out.”

She looked up at him with a world of love and entreaty in her eyes.

“You won’t spoil it, Jim? Oh, don’t—please don’t! It’s our first happy time together for so long, and it’s so perfect.”

But he did not answer her in the way she wished. His face was white, and very determined.

“Listen,” she continued vehemently. “I thought I would not tell you because it would hurt you so; but I will—I must! She came!—Yes?” as the light flashed into his eyes. “She came the day after you left, and I saw her. I was quite alone and she could say all the wicked, false things which she hoped would turn my love for you into hate. I had to listen! Jim, you had given me your word that you had never wronged me. It was that night in the hall at Pittivie, you remember?”

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I told you that I believed you—and I did! I listened to what she said, but I did not believe a single word—not one! I told her they were lies. I defied her to the very last minute. She went away knowing that she could never have any power over me again. She had to creep out of the house like a thief. She will not dare to come between us again—never!”

Nanny stopped, breathless with her own vehemence.

Jim’s self-control broke down. He had been afraid to allow his feelings to get the better of him—now he made no effort to check them. Nanny’s loyalty, and her love for him had been so staunch and true. All the chivalry in his nature went out to her in a flood of pride and tenderness.

He took her in his arms and kissed her as he had never kissed her before, even in the days of his first passion. The pent-up love of the past long year of loneliness poured from his lips in broken words, as he strained her to him, and called her by all the endearing names she longed to hear again.

She lay still against his heart, and murmured back tender words of love.

"It is all to be forgotten as though it had never been," she whispered. "We love each other so. We are together again."

Something seemed to recall him to himself. He tried to put her away from him.

"But there are things I must tell you," he said huskily.

"No—no," she implored.

"I won't feel right until I do," he insisted. "Nanny, there must never be any secrets again between us. Let me speak."

She raised her head to look at him.

"If it makes you feel bad, I suppose you must. Say it all quickly. It hurts me too, you know."

Then with her hand still in his, he told her the story of those past days from the time when Sylvia Maynard had first come into his life; of how he had broken his engagement to her and how terribly he had taken to heart the knowledge that he had been the cause of her miserable marriage.

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He spared himself in no way, and he told her of what he had bound himself to do in his self-reproach. He had tried to make atonement, but it had cost him his happiness.

Nanny read between the lines and saw the story in its true light.

Mrs. Maynard had never thrown a glamour over her. She had not trusted her from that first day when she had seen her standing looking up into Jim's face. She had realised all along that she was making use of Jim's generosity to suit her own ends.

For a wonder she did not speak out the thoughts which were in her mind. Jim had been very unhappy and miserable. He must be comforted. Now that he was her own again, she wanted to make him forget all that he had been made to suffer.

"Do you feel better for having told me?" she said softly, when he came to a pause.

To her surprise he rose, and began to walk up and down the length of the cabin. Every time that he came within reach of her she saw that the frown on his brow had darkened,

and there was a suppressed excitement in his manner.

He stopped before her at last, and said harshly.

"Nanny, you were right when you told me that I was blind, and that I had allowed her to make a fool of me. But what right had I to be blind when it was you who had to suffer? I had no right to sacrifice my own happiness, because it was bound up in yours. Why did n't I see? I would n't! I was a thousand times worse than blind. I feel like a criminal. Think of what I left you to go through this past year! The greatest crisis in a woman's life you had to face alone! I might have lost you!" he exclaimed passionately, "and the blame would have lain at my own door."

"Jim, dear, don't," said Nanny, reaching out to try and take his hand. She hated to hear him accusing himself, but he would not be helped, or allow his remorse to be softened.

"You made a splendid fight, and it's fair you should know the kind of victory you have won," he said.

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He took a letter out of his pocket and gave it to her.

“Read that! You ’ll see how I ’ve been deceived. Blind fool that I was,” he added bitterly, “and I allowed myself to be fooled.”

Mrs. Maynard’s confession was not such a surprise to Nanny as it had been to Jim. It had been firmly rooted in her mind all along that the woman was false.

The letter was very short. She read it without making any comment, and, putting it back into its envelope, laid it on the table. She watched her husband as he paced backwards and forwards for some time without speaking. Then she said in a voice which was not pleading but quietly imperative.

“Jim, come here!”

He obeyed, and she drew him down beside her. It was with reluctance that he yielded, and he looked at her doubtfully.

“I ’m not going to say my prayers about it,” he said. “I ’m not in a forgiving mood. I never will be.”

She passed her hand over his hair. He had

ruffled it up over his forehead and it made him look very angry.

"You are not to call yourself hard names," she said. "You thought you were acting from a right motive. It was your conscience which made you keep that promise of silence, Jim."

"My conscience! Damn my conscience then!" he exclaimed hotly. "A conscience is given you to keep you straight, is n't it? Mine has pretty well led me to the devil."

Her answer was to put her arms round his neck.

"Jim, I want you to say that you will forgive somebody," she murmured.

"No, I won't," he answered.

She put her lips against his ear, and repeated the question again so softly that it was a caress.

"How can you ask me to forgive her?" he protested. "I can't, Nanny."

"It 's not a her—it 's a him," she whispered. "I want you to forgive yourself, Jim. Say that you will. I won't be really happy until you do."

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They looked into each other's eyes silently, and she saw the anger die slowly out of his. He drew her closer to him, and his head dropped on her shoulder.

"Have it your own way," he said brokenly.

CHAPTER XXVI

GOOD-BYE TO PITTIVIE

THE light had faded; the cabin was in gloom, save where the soft glow from the electric lamp shed its radiance, before either of them spoke again.

At last Nanny raised her head, and said questioningly:

“Jim, we are moving?”

“We ’ve been under way for the last hour or more,” he said.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “What will they think at Pittivie?”

“I sent them a wire,” he answered.

He rose, and going over to one of the windows looked out.

“The rain has cleared off,” he said. “It ’s a lovely night. Would you like to go on deck?”

“Yes,” said Nanny.

He glanced at her white dressing-gown, and opening one of the cupboards which were fitted into the cabin walls, brought out a long coat of blue pilot cloth.

“How do you know where to find my things?” she asked, as he buttoned her into it.

She moved her chin from under his hand.

“It does n’t look as if a single thing had been changed. Who took care of them all?”

“I did,” he answered shortly. “No one came in here except myself. And I did n’t come very often,” he added. “It made me feel bad afterwards. I only sent them the keys the other day when the place had to be put in order for you.”

As they left the cabin Nanny laid her hand on his arm.

“We ’ll go and see the little blessing first. I hope she’s sound asleep by now.”

They crept in very quietly, but Mrs. Craggs was much too wide awake at her post not to hear the opening and shutting of the door, and she rose as they entered.

Her husband's profession was somehow written all over her. She was round as a life-buoy, with a head like a cork.

Nanny shook hands with her silently, and bent over the golden brown curls lying on the pillow.

"She won't be disturbed by us," she said, in a low voice. "She 's accustomed to people talking in the room. What do you think of her, Mrs. Craggs?"

Mrs. Craggs was Irish, and had known Jim since he was a baby himself.

"Shure, an' is n 't she the breathin' picture of the Captain himself," she whispered hoarsely.

Nanny's mouth formed itself into a round O of astonishment.

"I never heard that before," she said.

"And would it be me own eyes that would be desavin' me," protested Mrs. Craggs. "But shure an' ye niver saw him when he was in pitticoats. It 's little wonder if ye can't see the likeness I mane."

She scanned the child's face critically.

"Blessin's on yir head, me darlint, but it's yir father that ye are," she murmured. "Have n't I carried him in me arms when he was no bigger than yir jewel of a self!"

"You 'll be able to think that you 're doing the same thing over again," said Jim. "Do you know that we've run away with you, Mrs. Craggs? You may be boxed up on the *Katinata* for the next six months."

"And is n't it the place I'd best like to be in, for shure," she answered, looking up at him with a twinkle in her eye as he left the cabin.

There was a faint mild air blowing on deck, and Jim ordered chairs to be brought out and placed for them where they could sit and watch the coast as it slipped past in the semi-darkness.

He drew the hood of her coat over Nanny's head, and wrapped a rug round her feet. She saw him go up to Captain Craggs and have a discussion about something, and when he came back and sat down beside her, he said:

"Do you know what we 're going to do?"

"What?" she asked.

"In another hour or so we ought to be just off Pittivie. "We 're going as near as it is safe to go, and I think we 'll be able to make the castle out quite distinctly."

"I wish we could send up rockets, and give them some kind of good-bye," said Nanny. "I feel so horrid about running away."

Jim laughed.

"And have the life-boat turning out to see what 's the matter? No, I 'm afraid we can only wish them good-bye in our hearts. God bless them all!" he added reverently.

Nanny was the first to see the outline of the Castle Rock, and she could tell each window by its twinkling light.

Her heart was too full for speech, and Jim saw that there were tears trembling on her eye-lashes.

Slowly the lights came and went, fading back into the gloom from whence they had sprung. The beacon flash from the Mary Isle swept across the dark surface of the

water, and then it also grew faint, and was lost in the soft dusk of the Northern light.

Hand in hand those two, whose love had been rudely broken, and was now bound together again by bonds stronger and holier than before, sat on in a silence which neither of them wished to break.

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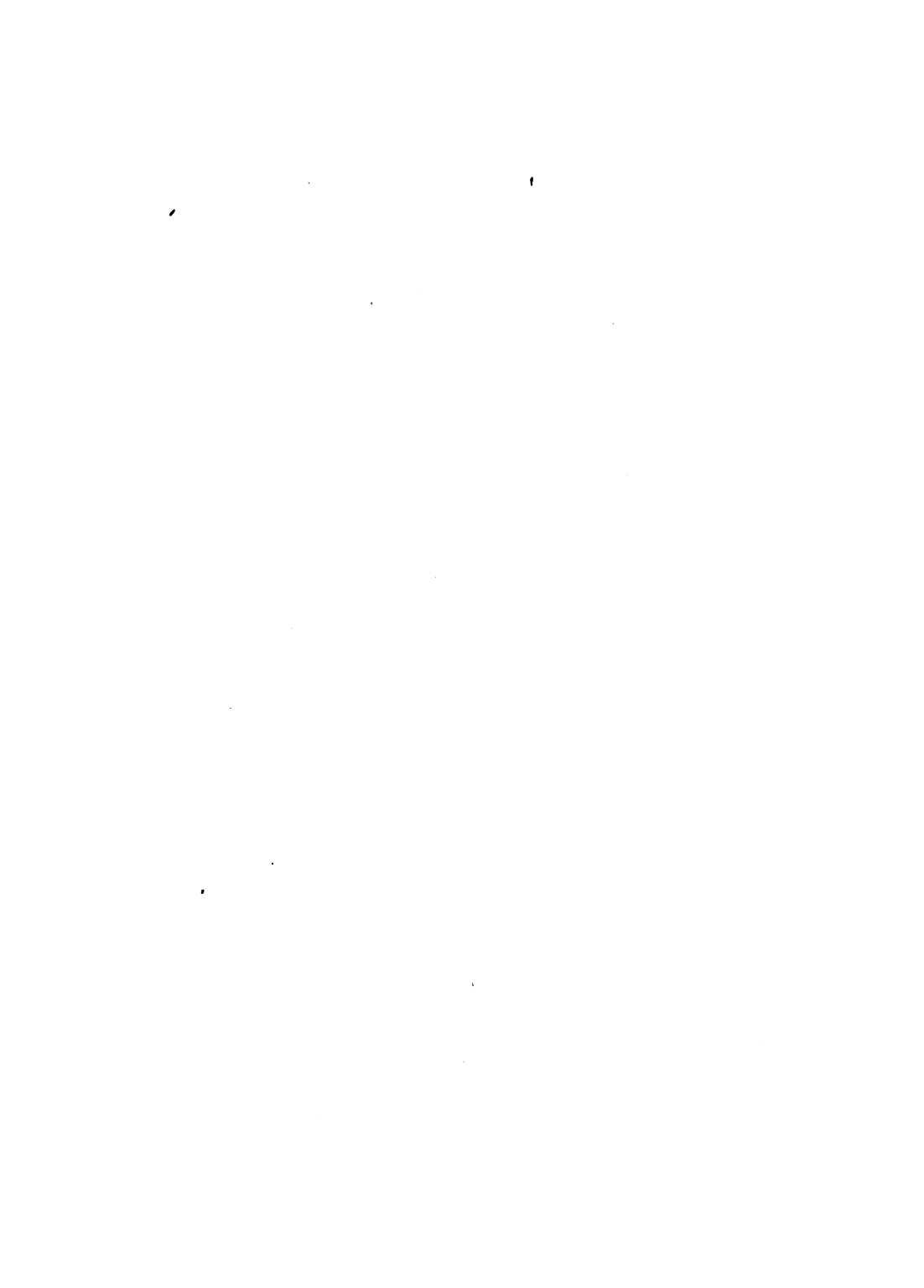
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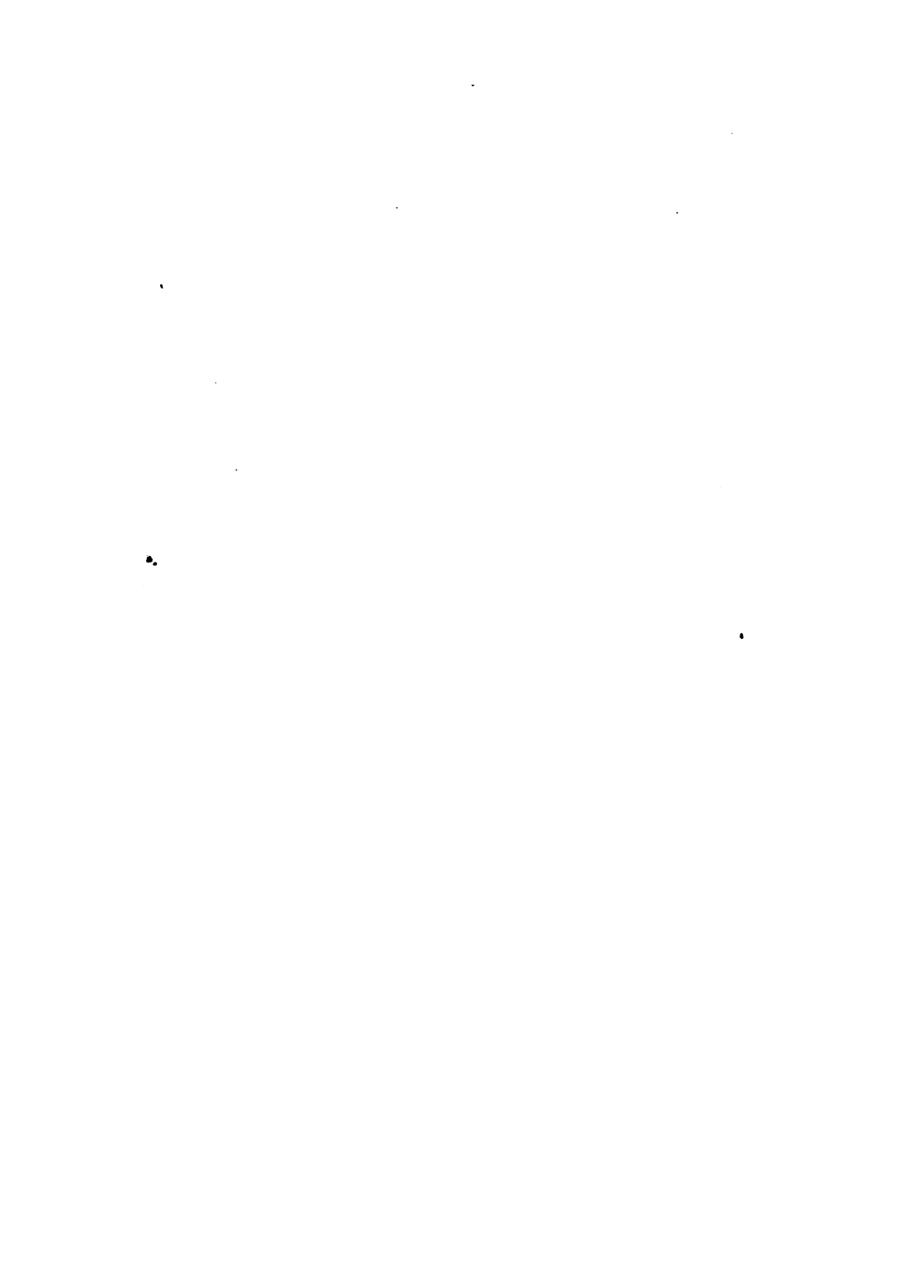
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